

The Development of the Children's Centre Programme in England: the
importance of context in understanding policy development and
implementation.

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Abstract

The thesis examines the Children's Centre Programme in England and develops an understanding of its development at national and local level by using Kingdon's (1995) streams model. Central to the thesis is a case study of the Children's Centre Programme which looks at influential factors in the development at national level and implementation of the programme in one local authority. Traditionally Kingdon's (1995) model has been used to understand the way that a wide range of factors interact to enable policy change at national level but a small number of authors have also used the model at local level showing that the range of factors that impact on the local implementation of a policy are also many and varied. One of the most well known aspects of Kingdon's model is in showing how the problem, policy and politics streams come together to create a window of opportunity which allows or drives policy change and or enactment. This thesis will use the model in a broader sense showing that although this window of opportunity is important the interaction of the three streams is ongoing and not only does it lead to significant policy change but it also informs debates and policy development on an ongoing basis.

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Introduction

When the first New Labour government took office in 1997 the field of policy relating to young children was fragmented, undervalued and under developed; it had not been seen by previous governments as an important area for government intervention (HM Treasury 1999, Winter 2009). By the time they left office in 2010 there had been a transformation, with services for young children being seen as an essential part of the welfare state (Winter 2009, Sylva and Pugh 2005). As a former minister interviewed for the thesis put it, the aim had been to “...create the new frontier of the welfare state - early years” an aim re-enforced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown in 2004 when he spoke of how;

...the nineteenth century was distinguished by the introduction of primary education for all and the twentieth century by the introduction of secondary education for all. So the early part of the twenty first century should be marked by the introduction of pre-school provision for the under fives and childcare available to all. (Comprehensive Spending Review 2004 in Sylva et. al 2010 p.208)

This, it could be argued, was exactly what had happened. By 2010 there had been a string of legislation passed that directly related to children’s services, Sure Start was a household name and the idea that investing in young children would have wide ranging benefits for all of society was generally accepted (Eisenstadt 2011). The term early years had historically related to pre-school education but as services for

the under fives expanded the term became associated with education, health, childcare and parenting support services aimed at this group of children and their families. This transformation in early years services had not happened accidentally it was the result of a conscious and sustained commitment to ideas of social investment and early intervention, discussed by John Smith MP as early as 1994 in the Borrie Commission Report (1994). The commitment was also supported by a number of reports published during Labours time in opposition (DES 1990, Ball 1994, Audit Commission 1996).

The Sure Start Children's Centres are perhaps the most well known and visible of New Labours developments in the field of early years. By 2010 there were 3500 Children's Centres providing childcare, child health services, parenting support, and job seeking training and support. These centres emerged in 2005 out of a number of other pilot initiatives put in place by New Labour in their first term of office. Much has been written about the impact of these initiatives on children, parents and communities (see Belsky et.al 2007 and www.ness.bbk.ac.uk) and there has been a good deal of academic debate about the thinking behind the New Labour approach (See: Lister 2003, Driver and Martell 2002, Gustafsson and Driver 2005, Parton 2008, Gillies 2008). The move from pilot initiatives focused specifically on areas of high deprivation (particularly Sure Start Local Programmes) to a national programme available to all has also received some academic attention (Lewis 2011, Lewis, Cuthbert and Sarre 2011, Lewis Roberts and Finnegan 2011, Lewis, Finnegan and West 2011, Bagley 2011). There has not, however, been a detailed

investigation into the development and implementation of the Children's Centre Programme as a whole and this is the first objective of this thesis.

Part of the reason for the identified gap is that this sort of in-depth evaluation of the development of a policy takes place in the public policy literature; however the policy area of early years has yet to emerge as an area of choice in public policy discourses. The second aim of this thesis, then, is to address this gap by providing an in-depth case study of the Children's Centre Programme at both national and local levels and to use Kingdon's model of policy-making to explore this development. In doing so it will add to the public and social policy literature.

Kingdon's streams model, developed in 1984 and updated in 1995, was an attempt to understand the complexity of the policy-making process and in particular what factors are involved in getting some policy ideas onto the government agenda over others. When discussing these ideas, Kingdon (1995) identified two distinct parts of the policy process which he chose to focus on. The first was agenda setting which he identified as the process whereby a problem becomes recognised as being important enough to require government attention. The second he termed alternative selection, where a range of ideas are considered in response to the government's agenda; this is where choices are made about policy enactment. Central to both parts of the process is a framework of three streams: the problem, policy and political streams, each stream has a different role within the policy-making process. The problem stream is where issues are highlighted and taken on or dismissed; most importantly this is where issues develop through evidence, crises and increased attention on certain problems and specifically problems that

need to be addressed by government. The policy stream is where ideas for policies are debated and developed, these policies are not necessarily new, in many cases policy ideas have been around in one form or another for a number of years but the time has never been right to put them into place. The political stream provides the context in which policy is made, through party politics, public opinion and wider influential factors which impact on the probability of a problem or policy being recognised and acted on.

Kingdon's (1995) original research focused on specific policy areas (health and transportation) in the US system however subsequent research and developments of the model have shown that "...the multiple streams approach is generalisable and robust enough to be analytically useful in a policy area different from the one for which it was originally developed" (Zahariadis 2003 p.23). The model acknowledges the many and varied factors that are contributory in the policy-making process but also that the influence of these factors will differ dependent on the area of policy concerned. It is suggested that Kingdon's (1995) model is particularly useful where there are issues of ambiguity within the policy area (Robinson and Eller 2010, Zahariadis 2003) and, as will be shown in the following chapters, this was certainly the case with the ideas behind the Children's Centre Programme.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is presented in a non traditional way; rather than having separate literature review, case study and analysis chapters the thesis has been constructed in line with Kingdon's assessment of the policy-making process. Chapter one, the

methodology chapter, will set out the details of the study reported in this thesis.

Following on from this the theoretical framework chapter (two) will set out

Kingdon's model exploring his understanding of the way that the three streams of problem, policy and politics interact with existing structures (processes) and

individuals to shape the creation and development of policy. The way that

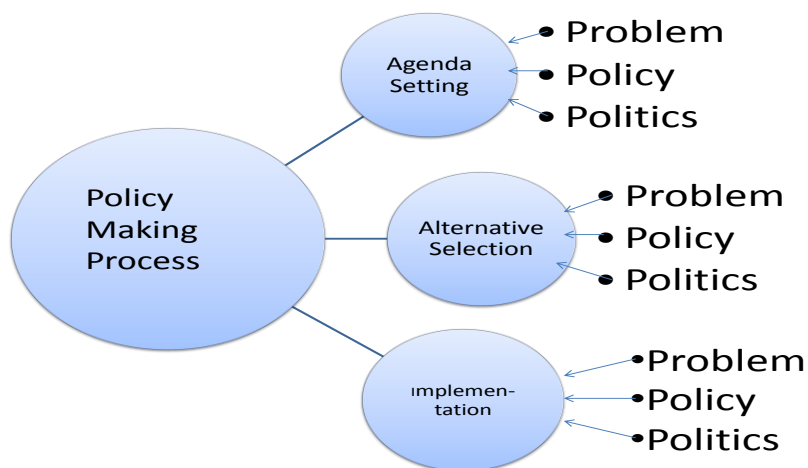
Kingdon's model can be extended and applied to the implementation phase of the policy process will also be explored.

The next three chapters will be constructed in line with Kingdon's assessment of the policy-making process represented in the diagram below. Each of these chapters

will combine academic literature, case study documentation and interview data to

provide a rounded picture of the policy-making process in the case of the Children's

Centre Programme.



(Fig. 0.1 Stages of the Policy-making Process)

Chapter three will focus on the *agenda setting* phase of the policy-making process; the phase when items become recognised as important enough for government to tackle. Identifying the key factors involved in the process of agenda setting this chapter will explore the way that the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty, the underlying problem to be tackled by the Children's Centre Programme, became prominent on the agenda of the New Labour government from 1997. The chapter will explore the way in which ideas were significant in this agenda setting phase; political ideology, theories of structuration, and ideas of social investment were all important in identifying the problems of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty as something that should be high on the government agenda.

Chapter four focuses on the process of *alternative selection*; (Kingdon 1995) where the vast range of policies that exist in a particular area are judged against a set of criteria to decide which will survive and be acted on and which will be discarded. This chapter will explore the policies that were put in place in the area of early years from 1997 onwards to address the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty. Although the Children's Centre Programme did not fully emerge until much later, studying this early policy development is essential in understanding the way in which the programme was eventually developed. This chapter will show that even once the window of opportunity had passed, the streams continued to interact and remain linked which allowed less dramatic change and some continuity in the policy development. Kingdon (1995) suggests that at this phase of the policy-making process the policy stream is most important;

it will be shown in this chapter that the policy stream was indeed important in the development of the Children's Centre Programme; however of more importance was the political stream which shaped and drove policy change, continuity and the appearance of continuity.

Chapter five focuses on the final stage of the policy-making process, the local implementation of policy. This chapter provides details of how the Children's Centre Programme was developed in one local authority (Mid City) and how those involved understood this development. Although Kingdon's original model did not include any discussion of policy implementation the case study shows how the model can be extended and applied to this phase in order to understand the contextual nature of the process of implementation. Using the framework of Kingdon's three streams of problem, policy and politics the chapter identifies key factors that were influential in the way that the programme was rolled out in Mid City and shows that the heritage of the local authority alongside and connected to the work of key individuals shaped the Children's Centre Programme.

Chapter six will bring together the analysis from chapters three, four and five to show how complex the development of the Children's Centre Programme was and the importance of context at both national and local level. It will also show that Kingdon's model provides an excellent framework within which to explore and understand this complexity. In addition this chapter will explore the ways in which the case study can be used to further develop Kingdon's model. The successful extension of the model to the local implementation phase is important as this has rarely been done and this chapter will show the benefits of this extension for the

study of public policy. The chapter will also explore how Kingdon's model can be used to understand continuity in the policy process. The model has traditionally been seen as most useful for exploring significant change but the case study will show that the problem, policy and political streams remain closely linked after the window of opportunity has passed and continue to shape continuity. The interaction of process and participants (structure and agency) is a key theme in all three aspects of policy-making and the case study highlights that extending the model to the local level allow some overlap in thinking about the role of individuals within the policy processes

Chapter 1

Methodology

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this first chapter is to set out the objectives of the thesis and methods used to meet these objectives. The first part of the chapter will set out the importance of considering the theoretical context of the policy-making process. Issues of structure and agency dominate the literature which underpins this thesis and thus provide an important consideration in methodological discussions. The chapter then goes on to outline the general research design (the case study) before providing a more detailed discussion of how the methods used meet the research objectives.

The chapter will explore the practical and theoretical issues that arose in the course of planning the research, the data collection and data analysis. By setting out these issues here, at the start of the thesis, it is hoped that the way data, documents and literature are combined in the subsequent chapters will be better understood.

1.2 Theoretical Considerations

Much of the academic discussion related to the policy-making process has at its core, debates about which factors, broadly structural or agential, are most or singly important in the process. Understandings of the policy-making process will then determine the methodological approach taken in any piece of research in this area. The position taken in this study is that understanding the interplay between the influential factors in specific situations is more important than definitive answers as

to whether structural or agential factors are exclusively dominant drivers. This is not to suggest that there can be no framework or theory that can help to understand the policy-making process; on the contrary it is essential that theory remains central to policy-making research otherwise the tendency will be to simply describe the process as individual pockets of action (John 2012). Instead this thesis argues for the use of 'complex adaptive theories' (Kingdon 1995 p.224) that encompass all of the influential factors, at central and local levels. At the same time these theories allow for, and adapt to, the fact that different factors, both structural and agential, will have prominence in different policy areas and at different times; shaped by the people involved (both individually and as groups and networks), wider external factors and institutions.

From this position then the thesis is based on a case study of the Children's Centre Programme in England with an additional focus on one local authority. In the hope of developing a clearer understanding of the roles and interplay of the influential factors in the development of the programme, Kingdon's streams model is used to analyse the development and implementation of policy in the early years from 1997 onwards; at the time a relatively new area of government intervention.

Taking this approach to the design of the research is in line with Layder's (1998) adaptive theory which advocates that research "...focuses on the ties between agency and structure in social life and the connections between macro and micro levels of analysis" (Layder 1998 p.27). Based on an understanding that both agency and structure are essential elements in understanding all social phenomena, the theory holds an epistemological position that combines "...both the internal

subjective point of view of social interaction while simultaneously appreciating that such activity always takes place in the context of wider social settings and contextual resources”(1998 p.140). These ideas are central to the position taken in this thesis as it argues for a broad and fluid understanding of the process of policy-making and implementation that incorporates individual actors as policy makers and deliverers working within the institutional (both contemporary and historical) structures of Central and Local government and, increasingly, local communities.

Integrating theory and practice in research is also central to the Adaptive Theory approach as it “...attempts to combine an emphasis on prior theoretical ideas and models which feed into and guide research while at the same time attending to the generation of theory from the ongoing analysis of data” (p.25). Kingdon’s streams model provides the theoretical frame around which this thesis is based and in many respects it has guided the research but there is also an attempt to extend and further develop the theoretical framework by applying it in a new area (early years) and using it to understand the implementation of the Children’s Centre Programme at local level.

The emphasis on combining both structural and agential aspects of the development of the Children’s Centre Programme necessitated a research design that would allow for a wide range of factors to be studied and evaluated alongside each other. The case study approach provides such an opportunity and as described below the application of Kingdon’s (1995) theoretical framework to all parts of the case study ensures that the thesis retains a focus on theory while still allowing an exploration of the lived experience of the policy.

1.3 The Case Study

As this study aims to look at the Children's Centre Programme at both central and local levels, highlighting the importance of a range of theoretical, ideological and political influences in its development, a case study was deemed to be the most appropriate approach. The development of policy at central level is influenced by a whole range of factors, some recognised and understood at local level and some not, however the implementation of policy is also influenced by a range of local factors which are not necessarily understood at central level. Using one theoretical framework (Kingdon's Streams model 1995) to analyse both of these levels within one case study will also add to attempts to provide synthesis within the area of policy-making and implementation research.

Yin (2009 p.18) provides a definition of a case study as:

...an empirical inquiry that

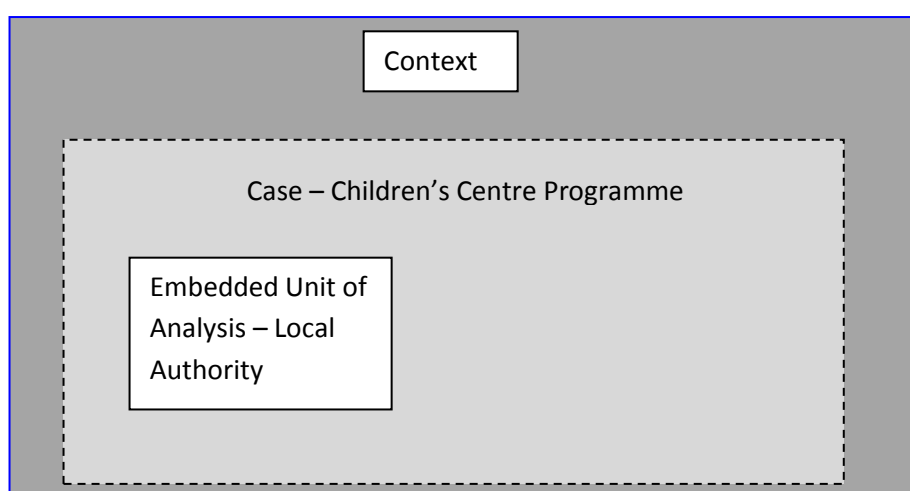
- investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

The case study approach is valuable when looking at policy-making and implementation as it is able to provide an in-depth, contextualised picture and allow for a macro or micro analysis of issues that are raised (Barrett 2004). A policy such as the Children's Centre Programme which was formulated from a range of initiatives that encouraged local diversity and was developed to be embedded in

local areas and build on existing services provides a good example of Yin's second point above. Producing a case study of national development and implementation in one local authority can provide a more comprehensive picture of the whole programme and the context in which it developed.

The type of case study design chosen is a single case design with an embedded unit of analysis (Yin 2009). The Children's Centre Programme is the single case and this will be looked at using documents and interviews relevant to central agenda setting and programme design. The local study provides an embedded unit of analysis within the single case and will look at implementation of the programme.

Although only one local authority will be looked at in this piece of research the nature of the case study design means that it can provide a framework for looking at the Children's Centres and other embedded units of analysis (other Local Authorities) could be included at a later stage to expand the case study.



(Fig.1.1 Case Study Design)

The local authority chosen as the local case is what Yin (2009) describes as a representative or typical case that will “... capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation... [and] may represent a typical ‘project’ among many different projects” (p.48). However, in line with Bryman’s (2012) discussion of case study construction, in this case Yin’s terminology is slightly misleading as there is no suggestion that the city chosen is indeed representative of other areas or typical of other programmes. As the original Children’s Centres were developed in areas with high levels of deprivation there may be some argument that comparisons and overlaps could be drawn between authorities that had similar numbers of Children’s Centres, however, led by literature on the evaluations of the Children’s Centre Programme an understanding developed that there was unlikely to be a representative or typical ‘case’ of a local Children’s Centre Programme, even in similar areas. Instead the city was chosen with an understanding that it was no more or less unusual than other cities but that the aim of the research was to apply a theoretical framework to the development that could be used to understand the process of policy development and implementation rather than to provide a model of perfect or imperfect development or implementation.

1.4 Research objectives

The sections above have explored and explained the general research design of this thesis but to ensure the validity of the research it is important to clearly identify research objectives that will allow the thesis to meet its overall aim. Three research objectives have been identified:

i) To identify the range of factors that drove New Labour's understanding of, and policy responses to, the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage in families with children.

The search for the explanation of why children of financially poor parents grow up to be financially poor adults has a long history and has been central to much social policy throughout the twentieth century (Welshman 2007). Ongoing academic debate highlights very clearly that the solutions to the problems put forward by policy makers are linked to socially constructed understandings or perceptions of the problem. For this reason it is an essential part of this thesis to identify the range of ideological, theoretical and political factors that shaped New Labour's understanding of the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty. An understanding of the position of the New Labour party (both in opposition and in government), in relation to the cause of the problem, the role of government in addressing the problem and in the types of policy responses developed to deal with the problem, is crucial in the attempt to fully understand the development of the Children's Centre Programme.

ii) To analyse the development of the Children's Centre Programme using existing theories of policy-making and implementation.

Although there is a substantial body of literature around the developments in the early years field from 1997 onwards (for a full overview of these changes see: Smith 2007b, Fawcett et.al 2004, Eisenstadt 2011), there is a much more limited range of literature specifically around the development of the Children's Centre Programme

(Lewis 2011, Lewis, Cuthbert and Sarre 2011, Lewis, Roberts and Finnegan 2011, Lewis, Finnegan and West 2011, Bagley 2011). At the same time there is a strong and comprehensive academic field relating to the policy-making process (see as a starting point: John 2012, Dorey 2005, Hudson and Lowe 2004, Cairney 2012) and the successful implementation of policy (for overviews see: Hill and Hupe 2009, Barrett 2004). There is a significant gap in academic literature that brings these two areas together and so the second research aim will be to begin to bridge this gap. As will be highlighted, the key debates in the policy-making literature centre on the dominant forces that drive policy; institutions, individual actors, wider outside forces are all seen as being central in a variety of theories. However, as John (2012) highlights an evolutionary model which acknowledges the complex and fluid interplay of a range of these factors is more useful in gaining a comprehensive understanding of policy development and implementation. It is for this reason that Kingdon's (1995) model will be used to analyse the development of the Children's Centre Programme to meet this second objective. As highlighted above using Kingdon's model will allow the thesis to use the framework of problems, policy and politics to gain a much richer understanding than could be gained from a purely descriptive case study and will help to explore the interaction of structural and institutional factors against individual influences.

iii) To analyse the role of context in the development of the Children's Centre Programme at local level.

The final research objective is focused on the local context of the Children's Centre Programme. It aims to build on, and add to, academic work in the field of implementation studies that attempts to understand the role of the 'local' in implementation. In line with traditional 'bottom up' approaches to implementation the thesis will attempt to look at the importance of individual actors at street level but, it will also place them within the wider structural context of the local authority. By extending Kingdon's (1995) model and using it as a framework to explore and analyse the implementation of the Children's Centre in one local authority, this objective will identify the role played by the local authority in shaping the actions of the individuals working in the centres and thus the programme as a whole. The extension of Kingdon's model to the local level builds on other studies (Exworthy et.al 2002, Exworthy and Powell 2004, Mannheimer et.al 2007, Ridde 2009) that have used the model to explore aspects of local implementation. These examples strengthen the case for using the model to synthesise analytical models of the policy-making process in recognition that the two 'phases' of policy development and policy implementation are two sides of the same coin. The application of the model to the Children's Centre Programme is further significant in extending the academic field of policy implementation with this under researched policy area.

1.5 Contribution to Knowledge

In meeting the three objectives detailed above this thesis will make two distinct contributions to knowledge:

- i) Expand the public policy literature by providing an analysis of a major policy development in the early years field.*

Early years policy was central to the New Labour aim of reducing inequalities, reducing social exclusion, increasing women's participation in the labour market, breaking the cycle of disadvantage and improving educational achievement. As highlighted in the introduction, there are pockets of academic study that look at specific aspects of these developments, their intentions and their outcomes.

Nonetheless, despite the increasing importance of early years as a distinct policy field, it has received no attention from the academic field of public policy. While Education (Lieberman, J. 2002, van der Steen et.al 2013) and Child Protection (Murray 2006, Evans 2011) have both entered the academic field, at the time of writing, early years and specifically the Children's Centre Programme has not.

This thesis begins to address this gap and thus makes a contribution to knowledge by using the lens of Kingdon's streams model to understand and analyse the development of the Children's Centre Programme in England. It will be shown that using the model can provide a framework to understand the range of forces that were important in the development and so provide a unique view of the development using the framework of policy-making theory.

ii) Extend Kingdon's model by using it to further understand the implementation stage and understand periods of continuity as well as change.

Secondly the thesis will extend Kingdon's model to the policy implementation stage and use it to analyse the range of factors that were influential in the roll out of the Children's Centre Programme in one local authority (Mid City). Although this is not

the first time that Kingdon's theory has been discussed in relation to local implementation, previous examples are limited (Exworthy et.al 2002, Exworthy and Powell 2004, Mannheimer et.al 2007, Ridde 2009) and substantially different to what has been done here. The existing studies focus mostly on the relationship between central policy makers and local implementers (two focusing outside the UK) rather than using Kingdon's model to look specifically at local implementation within the wider context of central policy-making.

Finally, using the model to analyse the development of the Children's Centre Programme will highlight a number of ways that Kingdon's model can be developed further; specifically in re-evaluating the interaction of the three streams after the window of opportunity has passed and in the dominance of the political stream in this interaction. These developments contribute to the attempt, within the field of public policy, to identify a comprehensive model of policy-making.

1.6 Methods

The research objectives described above are concerned with analysing a wide range of influential factors across the whole policy-making process (central and local) in order to understand how they provide the context for both development and implementation of the Children's Centre Programme. This discussion of context is crucial at both the development and the implementation stage but something that Terpstra and Havinga (2001) highlight as being overlooked in much research on front-line workers, where the focus is often on individual officers and their practices rather than the institutional context of the processes. Conversely, previous research on the central policy-making process focused on the institutional

context at the expense of the influence of individual agents (Barrett 2004). For this study data was needed from central and local levels and needed to cover institutional and individual understandings of all aspects of the Children's Centre programme. To achieve this, the main sources of data used were interviews and documentary evidence, in an attempt to gain both the 'official government line' (both central and local), individual understandings of this 'line' and the reality of the everyday enactment of the policy.

Meeting the first objective required the use of academic sources in addition to documentary and interview data due to the nature of this objective. Identifying factors that influence understandings of a political party is complex; even detailed interviews with a number of individuals previously active in government will only provide their individual understanding of the party therefore to some extent the link between academic understandings of theoretical perspectives and the actions of the political party must contribute to the formulation of theories of this understanding. This complexity is in part the reason for incorporating the related academic literature into the case study rather than presenting the two parts separately but the synthesis of different parts of the research process is also seen by Layder (1998 p.28) as important in the way that it highlights that "...research is often a 'messy' practical activity which does not follow a predictable sequence or adhere to clean conventional guidelines."

In order to meet research objectives two and three analysis of central and local documentation relating to the development of the Children's Centre Programme, and interviews with local and national actors was used. This meant that the thesis

was able to obtain both a top down and a bottom up understanding of developments at both central and local levels. It was suspected, and indeed proved to be the case, that at times these official and individual understandings differed. Indeed in some cases there was more than one interpretation of documentation by those interviewed. Far from this being problematic in trying to ascertain which view was the 'correct' one, the epistemological position taken in this thesis allowed for all sets of data to be valid as the process of policy-making and implementation is driven by a combination of structural and agential factors interacting in specific contextual situations.

1.7 Ethics

Before beginning the field work a number of sources of ethical guidance were consulted (SPA 2009, SRA 2003, University of Wolverhampton 2014). Adhering to good ethical practice is important in all types of research but especially so when conducting research with people. It is essential that... "[s]ocial researchers... strive to protect subjects from undue harm arising as a consequence of their participation in research" (SRA 2003 p.14).

Following the University ethics guidance the research participants in the proposed research would not be classed as a vulnerable. Interviews were linked with policy development and implementation and so it was felt that the interviews would not touch on anything of an overtly personal nature. It was, however, recognised that the interviews were to take place during a period of change as the new coalition government had recently gained power and questions had been raised about funding cuts in all areas of the public sector including Children's Centres. It was

recognised that the political change may make Children's Centre managers nervous about their positions and this may impact on their willingness to be involved in the research and in what they were prepared to share during the interview. With this in mind issues of confidentiality and anonymity were raised on a number of occasions at the initial contact stage, in the written guidance and at the beginning of the interviews. For research participants, knowing that the research adhered to a set of ethical guidelines may not have been enough to make them feel secure in the research relationship (Hammersley 1993). It was important that this confidence was gained on a personal one to one level by ensuring that participants were well informed and felt able to ask questions about their role in the research.

1.8 Pilot Study

Many research methods texts advocate conducting a pilot study before the main phase of data collection. Where data is collected through questionnaires or structured interviews it is suggested that a pilot study is essential in order to check the validity of questions and highlight any difficulties that questions may pose (Bryman 2012, Harding 2013). When conducting semi or unstructured interviews these issues are less pressing as interview schedules are used for guidance only and questions or areas of discussion will be adapted to best fit each interviewee. This said pilot studies can still prove useful in refining data collection techniques (Yin 2009), allowing the interviewer to gain confidence in using the schedule and to test the interviewers ability to use questions to gain a good range of information (Bryman 2012).

To those ends a pilot study was conducted in a neighbouring local authority in April and May 2011. The main purpose of the case study was to evaluate the informal interview schedule and to identify any issues that had not been considered in the design of the main study. The purpose was not to conduct a “...full dress rehearsal in which the data collection plan is used as the final plan as faithfully as possible” (Yin 2009 p. 92). Instead the pilot study was designed only to test the techniques to be used. Interviews were requested with five individuals who were managing Children’s Centres or who had been involved in the Sure Start programme previously.

Out of the five requests made, two interviews were carried out, two respondents declined and one was not contactable after a number of attempts. As these interviews were for the pilot study it was felt that time would be better spent understanding how better to engage interviewees rather than chasing one non-respondent or trying to make new contacts. The first interview was carried out with an individual employed by the Primary Care Trust (PCT) who had been a Sure Start Local Programme Manager and had then moved into a more strategic role commissioning services for the PCT and working with a number of Children’s Centres in one part of the city. The second interview was conducted with the Manager of a Children’s Centre who had been in post since 2002 and had overseen the transition from Local Programme to Children’s Centre.

The pilot study proved to be useful on a number of levels. First, it provided a clearer understanding of the practical approach of engaging individuals in research, secondly it refined interview techniques and schedules, thirdly it provided a clearer

understanding of the importance of local context and finally it provided insight into the way that personal ownership or investment in projects may impact on responses.

1.8.1 Lessons from the Pilot Study

Engaging Respondents

For the pilot study a combination of both opportunistic and random sampling was used. The criteria for choosing interviewees was that they should have a working knowledge of the Children's Centre Programme, but the city chosen for the pilot study was large with over 70 Children's Centres and many more individuals involved at strategic levels. The choice of who to approach was partly influenced by professional contacts in the city and partly by random sampling. Where an initial informal approach was made through a mutual acquaintance the formal request for an interview received a quick and positive response. Where no such initial informal request could be drawn on and the formal request came in the form of a 'cold call' email, the requests were turned down (on the grounds that the individual was too busy to help) or not responded to at all. It is clear that this limited experience cannot be seen as empirical evidence of the best way to approach interviewees; however, it did provide a position to reflect from and impacted on the approach taken in the main study.

Interview technique

Although only two interviews were undertaken valuable information was gained that improved the interview process in the main study. The first interview was not

recorded, brief notes were taken during the interview and then more detailed notes were made immediately after the interview ended. Although the main points of the interview were noted a wide range of information was discussed and it became clear that more subtle points that might prove to be important at a later time may have been overlooked. This was particularly important in the approach that was planned for the main study as each interview was not being used in isolation, it was envisioned that each interview would add to the knowledge base used to lead future interviews. Using this approach meant that important issues that arose could be incorporated into subsequent interviews and allow the research to be active and evolve, building on the expert knowledge of practitioners and policy makers to develop and deepen the quality of the data. In the next interview a digital recording was made which is a more usual (although not essential) method of data collection (Bryman 2012). This recording was then transcribed which gave another opportunity to hear what was said; surprisingly at this stage a number of points became apparent that had not seemed as significant in the initial interview setting; the transcription process allowed me to hear what was being said more clearly.

Importance of local context

The importance of the local context was made clear during the two interviews as some of the comments made by those interviewed were specifically linked to the way the local authority implemented the change to the Children's Centre Programme. In the local authority used for the pilot study a reorganisation of the Children's Centres had recently been announced, partly in response to public sector

spending cuts and partly in response to perceived problems with the way that the Children's Centre Programme had originally unfolded. Both interviewees referred to the local authority, the specific nature of the particular local communities that they were connected to and to the 'heritage' of the local authority in terms of the children's services that had been in place before the Sure Start initiatives. These discussions and the importance of them for practitioners own understandings of change reinforced the centrality of the case study approach and of the theoretical framework being used to analyse the case study, which sees context as central to understanding the policy-making process (Kingdon 1995).

Personal ownership and/or investment

The final area for reflection from the pilot study is concerned with the attachment of the individual at a personal and professional level. One of the purposes of carrying out a pilot study is to identify any questions that may make respondents feel uncomfortable (Bryman 2012). When constructing the interview guide and considering ethical issues it was not envisioned that any of the questions would have this effect, however, the pilot study highlighted the potential for a particular line of questioning to become uncomfortable for some respondents.

One of the issues raised in the literature around why the Children's Centres programme was introduced is linked to the inability of Sure Start Local Programmes to achieve some of the targets set for them, in particular around engaging 'hard to reach' groups (NESS 2005). It was expected that practitioners at front-line level would be aware of this issue and that there may be some disagreement about the discussions of this issue. What became apparent during the second interview in

particular, however, was the personal nature of this criticism to a practitioner who has been involved in the Local Programmes. Reactions to perceived criticism will vary between individuals as will the level of personal responsibility or blame that individuals take on but there is a chance that responses to this sort of questioning may be informed by the way that the change reflects on them personally or professionally. During the interview the question about the reason for the introduction of the Children's Centre Programme was answered with "We weren't doing it right" followed by other comments that emphasised the personal. The personal element of this discussion had not been anticipated; the fact that as practitioners committed to early years work the introduction of the Children's Centres could have been seen as a personal failure. The potential for this personal element to influence the answers to the questions in terms of 'saving face' or taking responsibility for much wider influences needed to be considered when framing questions and interpreting the findings. Yin (2009) in his discussion of questioning also highlights this as a potential issue and suggests that, instead of using 'why' questions when asking about the success or failure of programmes, 'how' questions can be used to take out the personal nature of the questioning; for example how did the change come about?

The small scale pilot study described here aimed to evaluate the interview schedule and identify any issues that may have been missed in the construction of the schedule. Lessons were learned around issues of access, interview technique and interpretation of data collected which were put into place to improve the main data collection phase. In addition, the pilot study highlighted the individual nature of

the responses and led to the development of four separate interview schedules: one for those working at national level; one for those working regionally; one for Mid City local authority officers and one for the Children's Centre managers. The schedules (see appendix 2) continued to be guides rather than scripts and each interview had the space to allow respondents to raise issues that they felt were important. The main study is described in the section below.

1.9 Main Study

As highlighted above two main sources of data were used: interviews and documentary material. They are discussed separately here but in practice and in line with the adaptive method (Layder 1998) the two were used alongside each other. Some documents were used to gain an understanding of the working of the programme before interviews, but the interviews themselves highlighted issues that led to further analysis of these documents and the introduction of more documents, this was especially so at local level. To ensure continuity both sources of data were managed and coded using Nvivo software (more details of how this was done are given below). This ensured that there was a framework for analysis and continuity, which was especially useful as data was collected over the space of eighteen months. It was important for the case study to collect data from central, local authority and front-line levels, but it was always understood that interview data from central level was likely to be more difficult to access and there was no expectation of equal numbers of respondents at each level.

By using the official documents, grey literature (local authority meeting minutes and reports) and personal interviews, the thesis aimed to gain a richness of data

that would allow for both collective and individual understandings to exist alongside each other. This distinction is particularly important when looking at the understanding of policy development and implementation as terms like ‘the government believed’ and ‘the local authority is very supportive’ were used often by interviewees. Government documents in particular often use the phrase ‘we’ when discussing the rationale for policy development or change. What this collective understanding actually consists of is difficult to pin point as it cannot simply be attributed to one or more individuals (for example individual ministers). However, individuals are important in creating or sustaining, challenging or being led by that collective understanding. By combining the individual and collective understandings through interview and documentary sources it was hoped that the complex interaction of the two could be further investigated.

1.9.1 Interviews

Interviews are the most common method of qualitative data collection (Bryman 2012) and are an important source of case study data (Yin 2009). The purpose of qualitative interviews is to gain an in-depth insight into the participant’s point of view and or experience. In the research reported here highlighting the interaction of structures and agents is an important element in meeting the research objectives; in order to do this individual’s perceptions and interpretations of policy development are an integral part of the case study. It is highlighted in the following chapter that the development of policy was historically seen as a rational, ordered process but a more accurate understanding of policy development is one that acknowledges individual’s interpretation of policy as being central to the

development and implementation of policy. For this reason then interviews are essential in gaining individuals' interpretation of the Children's Centre Programme and its development at national and local level.

Yin describes the type of interview that is most useful in case study research as "guided conversations rather than structured queries" (2009 p.106). This type of guided conversation or semi-structured interview allows the interviewee to fully explore their interpretation of events and provide valuable information, for example on further relevant sources of information. Although a well established method of data collection the qualitative interview still draws some criticism; one of which is around respondents' ability or willingness to accurately remember events or feelings that are being discussed (Harding 2013). In the case study reported here, these criticisms need to be taken seriously as the events that were being discussed happened at least six years previously, and for some at central level longer than this. Although it may be claimed that retrospective interviews do not provide accurate data, oral history is seen as a valid and reliable source of information by many respected historians (see Perks and Thompson 2006, Counce 1994) and Thompson (1988) shows that any loss in memory of events is likely to occur in the immediate weeks following an event. Clearly there is a difference in looking back with the benefit of hindsight; however, even this can be useful in exploring understandings. In my interviewing I was explicit in asking about respondents' understanding at the time of the change to Children's Centres and many were very open in explaining that the way they understood it at the time was different to their understanding now.

The remainder of this section will outline the details of the interviewing that took place for this thesis. Interviews were semi structured with a number of key but broad areas to be covered. In practice they tended to be very fluid especially as I became more skilled at raising areas of discussion without having to consult my prompt sheet. The benefit of using semi-structured interviews was that it allowed flexibility within and between the interviews, giving the option to spend more or less time on particular aspects of the discussion, making the interview particular and personal to each interviewee, while still having a broad structure in place (Arksey 2004).

Interviews lasted between one and two hours with most being around 90 minutes. Following the experience of the pilot study, all interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Yin (2009) warns of the danger of using a recording device as a substitute for listening closely throughout the interview. However, on the contrary, in this case the recording device allowed active listening to occur as note taking was not required. In addition there was no requirement to make judgements about which information might be relevant and which might not. Having the interviews to listen to again later in the data collection phase (and in the data analysis phase described below) also proved very useful in the development of 'converging lines of inquiry' and triangulation (Yin 2009 p.115) as new data was collected.

At the local authority level, those interviewed had a range of professional experiences. Some had been involved in Sure Start Local Programmes which preceded the Children's Centre Programme. Some had only become involved once the Children's Centre Programme was up and running in the authority. Some of

those interviewed had experience of the programme in a more strategic position but also had experience of front-line centre management. It was impossible to predict the type of information that individuals would bring to the interview, so a fixed interview schedule had the potential to be limiting and even exclude relevant data.

At the time of data collection the local authority had 18 Children's Centres but only 13 managers as some centres were being jointly managed. The aim was to interview all Children's Centre managers and the local authority officers with direct responsibility for the Children's Centre Programme. The decision to interview all managers rather than to select a sample was based partly on the size of the local authority being studied and partly on the understanding that Children's Centres were very individual, a point raised in the NESS evaluation literature and highlighted in the pilot study. Interviewing all managers would allow the development of a rich picture of continuity and difference across the local authority.

Before contacting managers it was felt most appropriate to contact the head of service who agreed to be interviewed. The head of service who had been in post throughout the period being researched was essential both as a source of information but also as a gateway into accessing other respondents. As part of this interview I gained the support of the head of service to contact all managers in the local authority.

Initial contact was made by phone to each centre. During this call the research was explained and permission was gained to send an email with further information and

the respondents' information sheet. This email was then used to negotiate the time for interview or was followed up with another phone call to arrange a suitable time. Being able to say that I had already spoken to the head of service proved useful as it seemed to put people at ease and may have validated the research that I was doing. In stand-alone Children's Centres access was fairly unproblematic as there was often a direct phone number to the Children's Centre manager. However in those centres located in schools and especially where the head teacher was also Children's Centre Manager access was more difficult as it had to be negotiated through the school office administrator, many of whom insisted on acting as gate keepers and passing interview requests along. In total 16 interviews were conducted within the local authority, this included 12 Children's Centre managers, the head and deputy head of service, one ex-Children's Centre manager in the city and a strategic manager from a neighbouring authority who had previously worked in the city. As the research progressed the councillor who had been lead for Children at the time of the Children's Centre development was identified as someone who would also be useful to contact. Although contact was made, the individual concerned declined to be involved in the research.

As is the case when using qualitative interviews, the data collected represented the 'individual stories' and experiences of the individuals involved, however as the interviews progressed there was a high level of overlap in the 'stories' being told. Significant aspects of the local authority approach and specific changes that impacted on the children's centre programme were raised by all of the managers interviewed. This coherence in the data was very useful in the process of coding

but it was also an important aspect of triangulation suggesting that individual accounts could also come together to provide a 'collective story'.

At central level it was less clear who needed to be contacted and the process was complicated by the reality of gaining access to some individuals, especially previous government ministers. Barrett (2004 p.257) highlights the problem of "...gaining access to both policy makers and implementing actors in the same project" and suggests that this can lead to a less interpretive approach being taken to the study of policy development. In the end the sample was opportunistic as a number of requests were put out to relatively high profile figures who had previously been involved in the Children's Centre Programme and others who were recommended through a series of professional contacts. Although the number of interviews was quite limited the relevance of those interviewed was extremely good and consisted of a very relevant former government minister, a ministerial advisor, a senior civil servant in the Sure Start unit and an individual who supported the roll out of the Children's Centre strategically at regional level. Two of those interviewed are highlighted in national documents as being key influential figures in the development of the Children's Centre Programme.

Interviews with these central figures were conducted using the same guidelines as the local interviews; interview schedules were broad and allowed for fluidity in the discussions. These interviews were generally shorter than those at local levels and tended to be more structured and less conversational as individuals tended to be concise in answering questions and at least three had a lot of experience of talking about the Children's Centre developments in a public capacity. Answers to the

more general introductory questions were more rehearsed. In the case of the former minister, time constraints proved to be significant with an initial one hour appointment reduced to 30 minutes on the day.

Each of those interviewed about central level developments again expressed their own interpretation of the developments but similar to the local interviews there was overlap in these interpretations which re-enforced the importance of the issues raised.

In total 20 interviews were carried out across central and local levels. The information gained was rich and informative. Although some information overlapped there did not come a point of information redundancy where no new information was gained. Each interview provided a unique view point shaped by the individual's position in the Children's Centre story and the range of experience that had brought them to this position.

1.9.2 Confidentiality

At the start of the research all respondents were assured that the work would be anonymised. At central level the name of those involved would not be used, instead a general description of their role would be included and at local level the name of both the local authority and all respondents would be changed. At central level all those who responded were happy with the way that their identity had been concealed with two stating that they were happy for their names to be used (although this wasn't done).

At local level rather than give each respondent a pseudonym the generic term of *Children's Centre Manager* or *local authority officer* was used, it was felt that using these generic terms and changing the name of the local authority would ensure that respondents were not recognisable from outside the authority however it became apparent that confidentiality within the local authority was more complicated. Once all of the interviews with those in the local authority were complete and transcribed a document was produced which gave a detailed overview of the areas discussed (in line with good practice guidelines SPA 2009). This document highlighted a range of views and opinions and included a wide range of quotes from respondents. This document was sent via email to those who I had personal email addresses for (those who I only had generic centre addresses were contacted through these addresses and asked for a personal address to be provided). Out of 15 respondents only two replied with comments, unfortunately both felt that although their names had been removed they were still too identifiable from the transcript and asked that two small quotes be removed. The difficulty was that they were only identifiable within the local authority but the transcript had necessarily been sent to all managers at once. Obviously one way around this issue would have been to simply send respondents the transcript of their own interview however as highlighted above without knowing how their discussions were to be used, i.e. without providing a context, I felt that this was not the most ethical way to proceed. The offer was also made to attend a managers' meeting to discuss and overview the research data, although a number of respondents had expressed interest in this idea during the interviews the offer was not eventually taken up.

1.9.3 Documents

Yin identifies documents as playing “...an explicit role in any data collection in doing case studies” (2009 p.103) and discusses them as one of the six sources of evidence that can be used in case study research. Using documents alongside interviews was important for triangulation as interviews alone, although valid in their own right, have the potential to give a one-sided account of those personally involved in the development being studied. Taken together, interviews and documents give a richer basis to the case study.

In the area of policy-making and associated documents Lewis (2004) suggests that weighing the evidence in terms of significance and value to the research is essential especially in areas with extensive documentation. There is certainly a large amount of documentation that is related to the extensive developments in early years during the New Labour government and many documents associated with Sure Start in one way or the other. Initially only those documents which referred to the development of the Children’s Centre Programme were used, rather than the setting up of Local Programmes or the evaluations of outcomes. Alongside these documents that provided guidance on developing the Children’s Centre Programme within Local Authorities were analysed in depth (see appendix 2). As the Children’s Centre was a wide ranging programme there tended to be one central document, for example the Inter-departmental Review, and then a variety of versions of the contents presented for different users; professionals, parents or publicity material. The documents listed in appendix 2 were chosen as the most comprehensive

documents that showed the development of central Governments' ideas over time and at local level the responses to central direction by the local authority.

Other documentation was used to gain a broader more general understanding of the programmes that had preceded the Children's Centre Programme and wider developments in the early years area. As highlighted above the process of data collection was not fixed or pre-determined which meant that the list of documents used, developed through the research process with some of the local documentation being highlighted as important by those interviewed. Documents and interview data were considered alongside each other.

When using documents in this way it is important to consider the broader context that the document exists within, what came before it or contributed to it and the broad academic and political context. This should also include consideration of the intended audience (Lewis 2004). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) highlight this point in their discussion of the minutes of meetings which are necessarily the public face of meetings and in the case of council meeting minutes as used here, are written in the knowledge that the general public will have access to them. This knowledge will automatically shape the content and or style of the written minutes.

Using the following criteria helps to formalise this weighing of documentary evidence:

Authenticity. Is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?

Credibility. Is the evidence free from error and distortion?

Representativeness. Is the evidence typical of its kind [?]

Meaning. Is the evidence clear and comprehensible?

(Bryman 2012 p.544)

As the documents used for this study are 'public' rather than 'private' documents produced by central or local governments the questions of authenticity and meaning are relatively uncomplicated. The questions that relate to whether the documents provide a true representation take the discussion back to those relating to qualitative data more generally. Documents of the sort used in this thesis (mostly reports and guidance documents) could be seen as a representation of the government's position at the time of publication but in line with Atkinson and Coffey (2011) the position taken in this thesis is that the documents represent the message that the government (central and local) wanted to portray and were shaped by the intended audience. This was seen most clearly in the variety of guidance documents published in 2002 and 2003, which gave the same message but in slightly different ways for different audiences (DfES 2002a, DfES 2002b, DfES 2003a). Understanding the documents in this way means that they become valuable in understanding government aspiration and intention. Also of value is understanding the way in which the documents impacted on front line workers. Very few of the documents used in the study were explicitly mentioned by those interviewed but, the ideas portrayed in some of them were part of a collective understanding of what 'the government thought'. Subsequent chapters show that documentary explanations of the Children's Centre Programme did not always align

with the reality of change or the perceptions of that change by those working in the field. This does not lessen the value of the documents; this disconnection is itself of value in studying the policy-making process.

Yin (2009) highlights two, more practical problems that may arise when using documents; retrievability and access, both of which became issues in my document data collection at central and local level. Gaining access to the relevant documents was complicated by two factors. The first was the change in government in 2010, which inevitably led to the archiving of documents making them more difficult to locate and access. Alongside this, although the thesis was looking at the Children's Centre development which was rolled out in 2005/6 it became apparent that much of the contributory documentation was published much earlier between 2000 and 2004. Any documentation more than 10 years old and from a previous government is difficult to access. Fortunately I was able to obtain paper copies of some of the relevant documents from a former colleague and others were obtained through extensive internet searching.

At local level all council minutes and documentation from 2000 onwards are provided on-line through the council website. Although a little difficult to locate, the documentation relating to the development of the early years initiatives leading up to the Children's Centres Programme and the way in which the programme would be taken forward by the council were accessible and proved invaluable in constructing the case study. The complexity and inter-related nature of many early years initiatives and services dealt with by different council sub-committees meant that there was no one location for the information that was relevant and in a few

cases documents including meeting minutes that may have related to the Children's Centre Programme were marked as exempt from public access. Although a request was made to the council for access to this material for the purpose of the study this was not granted. In addition to the formal guidance and planning documents information was also gained from information leaflets, newspaper reports and individual centres.

Overall the documents were used to provide another contextual layer in the analysis of the development of the Children's Centre Programme. Qualitative content analysis (Bryman 2012) was used to draw out themes in the documents which allowed the necessary flexibility in approach to each document used; it also allowed a good link between data collected from the documents and interviews.

1.10 Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and then coded through Nvivo software. This software was also used to code the most significant documents used in the study. As I had not used electronic coding software before, this decision was not taken lightly; the time taken to become familiar with the software was significant and so it was important that the reasons for using Nvivo were clear. The benefits of using this type of software are well documented (Bryman 2012, Harding 2013) in the case of this research project one of the key deciding factors was the timeframe for data collection (twelve to eighteen months) and the issues raised by being a part time student. It was important that data collected and analysed could be recorded and stored in a way that promoted continuity and allowed data to be retrieved easily.

As the aim of the research was to identify understandings of policy development and change, a thematic approach was taken with both document and interview data; this meant that content analysis and word searches within the data were not appropriate. Understandings were expressed in a variety of ways, using a range of words and phrases, so each interview and document was coded manually (within Nvivo). Where documents were only available in hard copy any relevant points were either; scanned and imported (where large sections were of particular relevance), or smaller sections were manually typed into Nvivo. Formal analysis in terms of coding did not begin until all interview data and significant documents had been collected but clearly the development of ideas on themes was a continuous process. Notes taken after each interview highlighted some of the key points raised and themes often developed from these along with the data gained from relevant documents.

In line with the Adaptive theory approach identified earlier, data collection and analysis could be described as an interconnected process; each new interview or document adding to the context for looking at previously collected information. Layder (1998 p.25) highlights the importance of integrating the many parts of the research process and of keeping theorising and analysis in mind throughout, “...theorizing should be a continuous aspect of the research process rather than reserved for special junctures and / or occasions.” This approach was used throughout the research process and a constant comparative method was employed when identifying themes and codes (Harding 2013). An initial set of broad themes were used as a starting point and these themes were used to code

each transcript and document. As more data was coded the themes expanded into sub sections and new themes were added, led by the data. If transcripts or documents produced new themes previously coded data would be revisited to see if any more relevant material could now be identified. Using this approach meant that themes grew out of the data which links to the origin of the constant comparative method in grounded theory, however as Harding (2013) suggests it is now a commonly used method within qualitative data analysis and not necessarily tied to grounded theory.

The collection and analysis of data is intensive in terms of time and personal investment; it is therefore all the more important for a researcher to be able to step back and reflect on the process and outcomes of their research. In the type of qualitative, interpretive research that is reported in this thesis there is no suggestion that this means the researcher attempting to take an objective and detached stance in respect of the data collected and analysed. Instead it is important that the researcher is able to work within their own subjectivity, recognising their commitment to the data but also being able to be reflective and reflexive in evaluation of the research process. It is this process that will be the focus of the next section.

1.11 Reflection on the process

1.11.1 Validity

The concept of validity is central to the credibility of any research, showing that the data is accurate and appropriate in respect to the aims and objectives of the

research (Denscombe 2010), and that the findings accurately reflect the data (Jupp 2006). Validity operates at a number of levels. First in terms of the overall research approach, in this thesis the case study approach, second in ensuring that the data collection and analysis methods are appropriate in terms of the research objectives and third in respect of the data reported being a true reflection of the data collected. Each of these points will be dealt with in turn.

In terms of the overall research approach, the case study approach is flexible and used in a variety of ways to research a variety of topics. Necessarily then, the issue of the validity of the case study approach will be complex. One of the key features of the case study approach is that it employs a range of data collection methods; whether those methods are qualitative or quantitative will impact on the way that validity is measured and judged (Yin 2009). The research described here was used to meet the research objectives described above which are essentially concerned with qualitative issues. The elements that make up the context in which policy-making occurs and how that context is understood by those personally involved in the programme. The use of a case study, in which context is central, as the overall approach was appropriate (see section 1.3). Within the case study an interpretive approach was taken, that is, qualitative methods of interviewing and the thematic analysis of documentation in order to meet the research objectives identified above. The case study produced reflected individual and group interpretations and understandings of the development of the case being studied rather than any externally constructed version of events. This interpretation of policy development is central to much of the theoretical basis of this thesis.

The next issue of validity is around ensuring that data collected remains 'intact' and continues to represent a range of individuals' views rather than a collection of quotes. With an individual piece of research undertaken over a four year period it would be easy to lose sight of the original purpose of the research or to lose a sense of coherence in the data which, through necessity, was collected over a relatively long period. A number of factors were important in ensuring and maintaining the validity of the research data collected. As described above, a clear link was made between the theoretical position underpinning the research, the research objectives, the methods used to collect data and the type of data collected. This level of coherence ensured that the data collected and the methods used to collect it were the most appropriate for the purpose of the thesis. In addition, there were important outcomes relating to validity from taking the constant comparative approach to data analysis. As highlighted above, the data was coded using Nvivo software and one of the criticisms of using this type of software is that it increases the likelihood of data becoming fragmented (Bryman 2012); becoming a series of quotations or paragraphs de-contextualised from the interaction that they occurred within. The method of going forwards and backwards between interview transcripts, documents and other literature meant that the data did not become fragmented, I regularly read the full interview transcripts, listened to the taped interviews and re-visited key documents as well as working with the coded data. The outcome of this approach was the production of rich data, essential for the case study approach and of key importance in ensuring validity (Jupp 2006).

The final aspect of validity that is important is connected to the way in which the data presented in this thesis is a true representation of the data given by respondents. One of the most important ways to ensure that data remains valid is to continue to engage with respondents to ensure that the way their data is used does not result in a loss of context and thus validity. It was discussed with respondents at the time of interview that their comments would be transcribed and then some of their comments may be used in the thesis. The decision was made not to simply send respondents a transcribed version of their interview to confirm (although it was made clear that this could be done if required). Instead the aim was to provide respondents with something that would allow them to see how their comments would be used in context allowing them to respond to the way their comments were portrayed and represented rather than simply confirming what they said (Bryman 2012).

For those involved at central level, once the relevant chapter was complete (in draft) it was sent to respondents so that they were able to see how their comments were used in context. Each respondent had been given a title, for example policy advisor or minister and they were then able to identify any comments attributed to them in the study, they were also asked to comment on any other more general aspects of the chapter they felt may have been misunderstood or misrepresented. The feedback from these respondents was very positive; a few minor changes were requested but the overall feedback was that the chapter was a good representation of the complexity of the development of the Children's Centre Programme at

national level. This feedback confirmed validity of both the interview data and the narrative and analysis derived from it.

For those at local level a slightly different approach was taken due to the level of connection between respondents and the fact that discussions with those in the local authority had often gone beyond the parameters of this study. At the time interviews were undertaken a new Coalition government had recently taken office and a period of austerity was promised with the focus largely on public sector services. The first few respondents had raised the issue of the future of the Children's Centre Programme and the idea was raised that it would be useful for me to come back at a later date to see how things had worked out. A decision was therefore made to add this topic to the interviews. These discussions of respondents' expectations and fears for the future of the service do not feature in this thesis but it was felt important that they were given a chance to validate their contributions (which may be used in the future). As highlighted in section 1.9.2, a separate case study was produced for respondents in the local authority; this case study included the whole range of discussions and a large number of quotes to ensure that any used in the final thesis would have been approved by respondents. The response from those at local level was more limited than from those at central level with only three responses; two were from Children's Centre Managers who were complimentary of the case study generally but asked for two specific pieces to be taken out but the third response, from the Head of Service was very positive and stated that the case study produced, in her opinion, captured the complexity of the development within the Authority. Once the local case study chapter (to be used in

the thesis) was complete another offer was made to meet with managers to discuss the work but by this time a reorganisation of the management of Children's Centres in Mid City had begun and this request was declined.

1.11.2 Representativeness

One of the main criticisms of using a case study design is that it is not representative; a study of implementation in one local authority area cannot be seen as being representative of all local authorities in the UK (Bryman 2012). This point is valid, what is important however is that this was never the intention of the case study, and rarely is in case study research (Yin 2009). Both national and local parts of the case study aim to highlight the importance of context in the policy-making and implementation processes as the basis of analysis. The nature of context means that it is highly unlikely if not impossible that the context can be replicated across time periods or geographical locations especially considering the combination of structural, historical and individual factors. This does not mean that the case study is of no use in understanding the Children's Centre Programme as a whole, or indeed similar developments in other local authorities. As highlighted above, the local authority used in this study is no more or less representative of all Children's Centre developments than any other Children's Centre. The framework used to analyse the case study does, however, provide a structure to understand the complex range of local issues that impacted on the process which means that the framework could be used in other contexts to gain a greater understanding of the processes as a whole. Although specific issues may be

different, using the same framework will allow some level of comparison between local authorities.

1.11.3 Researcher issues - Reflexivity

Clearly it is an important part of any research study to evaluate the researchers own influence on the process. Following a broadly feminist methodological approach that "... is respectful of respondents and acknowledges the subjective involvement of the researcher" (Letherby 2003 p.5), the idea of an impartial researcher who should not impact on the research process is not a position that I would adhere to or think possible. What is important as a researcher is my ability to reflect and be reflexive, to recognise and acknowledge the impact of decisions I made during the research project. There are many definitions of reflexivity and methods of achieving a good level of it in the research process but essentially the process of reflexivity is concerned with understanding the impact of the researcher on the process and a consideration of how and why decisions were made during the process (Harding 2013).

As a part-time student and a full-time lecturer a decision had to be made early on which 'persona' to use when approaching potential respondents, as it is widely accepted that interviewees respond differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions (Denscombe 2010). This acknowledgment of 'self', as a researcher, is also central to the feminist approach (Letherby 2003) and was heavily influenced by my own perception of and identification with each position. Regardless of my full-time job, I am a student and in many ways new to the research process. This is not the self image that I readily identify with and after

feeling very dismissed by phone calls made as a student in the pilot project I decided to try to combine the two by introducing myself as someone who taught at the University but was undertaking the research as part of my further study. The response rate of respondents was much improved from the pilot study, but it is impossible to know if this approach or some other factor influenced this outcome.

Once interviews were arranged other decisions were made about the tone and style of the interview that attempted to ensure a respectful approach. Interviews were arranged in the respondents' places of work for convenience and to allow them to feel most at ease. When introducing myself I decided to mention the fact that I had an early years background but that I had not practiced in early years for many years. This had the effect of positioning me as more of an 'insider' than an 'outsider' (Acker 2000); as someone who was familiar with the area under discussion but clearly not an expert. This information did have an impact on the interviews at local level as in almost all interviews with Children's Centre managers, at some point, respondents referred to my background in one way or another with comments like 'as you probably remember' or 'as you probably know'.

The question of whether these decisions about the way I presented myself led to bias in the interviews relates back to questions of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Taking a broadly feminist methodological position, I acknowledge that all decisions I make as a researcher, even decisions not to reveal personal information, would impact on the research (Letherby 2003). Therefore taking a reflexive approach in considering my own role in the research process and the decisions I made was essential. As a part-time student it was crucial that

decisions and thoughts were recorded as there were often time lapses which risked a lack of clarity in the reasoning behind decisions. As part of the transcription process, additional notes were made about my style of questioning and whether I felt that I had led or influenced any part of the discussion. These notes were reviewed before the next interview in an attempt to address any issues raised. A research diary is also advocated as a method for recording ideas and decisions and a way of aiding reflexivity. Although a formal research diary was not kept, a separate note book was used to record reflections and notes related to the methodological framework and methods used ensuring that these ideas were kept separate to developing ideas and notes related to the wider content of the thesis.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with providing an overview of the approach, methods and analysis used in this thesis. Placing the methodology within the broader theoretical framework of the thesis, the chapter began by showing how the thesis aimed to understand the policy-making process from both structural and agential perspectives incorporating both central and local understandings of the development of the Children's Centre Programme. The use of a case study approach, using data collection methods of interviews and documentary analysis has been shown as a valid and appropriate way to address the three research objectives that this thesis will meet:

- i) To identify the range of factors that drove New Labour's understanding of, and policy responses to, the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage in families with children.

ii) To analyse the development of the Children's Centre Programme using existing theories of policy-making and implementation.

iii) To analyse the role of context in the development of the Children's Centre Programme at local level.

The notion of context is central to the objectives of this thesis and the chapter has shown how the approach taken has maximised the potential to gain a depth of information that will allow a fully contextualised account of the Children's Centre development. The purpose of this thesis is not to provide a model for perfect policy development and implementation; instead the work provides the opportunity to investigate a somewhat neglected area of government policy and to analyse the wide variety of factors that influence its development.

The chapters that follow will use the data collected from interviews and documents described here alongside wider academic commentaries to provide a rich contextualised account of the development of the Children's Centre Programme in England.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

Traditionally, the policy-making process and policy implementation has been dealt with as two separate, although related, areas of study. The first is concerned with the way problems and solutions are conceived and developed into concrete policy, while the second is concerned with how that policy is translated into 'real action' on the ground. As the aim of this study is to look at the Sure Start Children's Centre policy from development at national level to the implementation at local level, it is necessary to draw on both areas of study. A number of writers (Exworthy and Powell 2004, Sabatier 1986, Hudson and Lowe 2009, Wolman 1981, John 2012) suggest that looking at policy formation or implementation can only ever give a partial understanding, so fusing models from different areas of policy studies can offer a fuller contextualised understanding. This level of synthesis will be important for the thesis as a whole and in the later part of this chapter.

Initially, the chapter will give an overview of the ideas that exist around central policy-making and implementation as separate sections. Following this, Kingdon's (1995) streams model will be introduced as the theoretical perspective that will form the main part of this chapter and underpin the thesis more generally. An explanation of how Kingdon's model helps in understanding the policy-making process at central level will be followed by a discussion of how the model can be extended and applied to the implementation process.

2.2 Policy-making at National Level

Early discussions of policy development saw a linear connection between an identified problem and a policy solution. Ideas of rational policy-making suggest that policy goals are set based on specified problems, all possible policy options are then considered and evaluated rationally based on a set of predetermined criteria before the most appropriate policy is chosen and put into place (Hudson and Lowe 2009). Theories of incrementalism challenged this rational approach and put forward the idea that policy changes slowly and gradually based on existing, accepted policy (Kingdon 1995, John 2012). In some cases these changes may be in response to feedback from existing policy that suggests adjustments or changes to deal with corrections or omissions in the original policy (Kingdon 1995). Any change that can be achieved without major discussions in parliament, consultations with the public, or major re-writing of legislation is likely to pass relatively unnoticed. Therefore, this type of policy change may also be useful for governments who would like to make major change, but realise that this may be opposed (Jordan and Richardson 1982). Although these stageist approaches are how many would like to see policy made, the reality is that policy-making is much messier and complex than this (Dorey 2005, John 2012). Problems, especially in the field of social policy, are rarely simple enough to ascribe definitive cause and effect or solution relationships and policy makers are influenced by a wide range of factors that impact on the 'rational' process (Kingdon 1995, Exworthy 2008, John 2003, Dorey 2005). In addition these sorts of approaches do not help in understanding the how and why questions associated with each stage so although

the stages may be a useful starting point for policy analysis they are less helpful in understanding the details or processes of policy-making (Dorey 2005).

2.2.1 Theories of Policy-making

In response to the inability of stage models to capture the full range of ways that policy is developed, a number of theoretical perspectives emerged that each focus on a particular influential factor that is seen to drive policy. These factors are diverse and include individual action, institutions, networks, ideas and exogenous factors. It is not the purpose of this chapter to engage in a comprehensive evaluation of all of these perspectives (for this see John 2012 or Hudson and Lowe 2009). It is important for this thesis to acknowledge the value of these approaches, but to highlight the limited insights that can be gained by focusing on one aspect of the policy-making process above all others.

The ideas of the 'new institutionalism', although not a coherent body of literature, highlight the importance of political institutions in the development of policy. A whole range of structures, institutions and historic decisions shape the nature of policy development. The most basic issues relate to the rules of policy development; the structures of the political institutions and the electoral system will shape the nature of governments and the likelihood of certain policies being developed (John 2003). Historic decisions on the nature of the institutions of welfare will shape further developments as:

Institutions embody cultures and past political decisions. Formal rules and structures, agreed or

introduced long ago, influence how political actors exercise their current choice, and they now apply to situations and contexts the original founders may not have envisaged. (John 2012 p.32)

Policy will be designed to improve and adapt the existing system rather than re-think the system completely (Hudson and Lowe 2009). Esping-Andersen's (1990) work on welfare models is illustrative of how the historic and existing political and welfare structures shape subsequent policy change. Political structures will also determine the levels of power that individuals or groups have within the political and policy sphere. Although there was much discussion of changes to a more 'presidential' style of government under the leadership of both Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair in the UK, the institutions of the political and parliamentary system ensured that this was not necessarily the case (Dorey 2005). Institutions set the 'rules of the game' and generally provide stability and a dampening effect on any sort of radical policy change, but it should be remembered that the way they do this is to "...structure the constraints and opportunities of decision makers" (John 2012 p35). In other words, the institutions are only one part of the process and individual action or the collective action of individuals is also central to the policy process.

More modern theories of policy-making focus on the changing nature of the structures of government and governance and argue that unitary systems of government have largely been replaced by more fluid networks, partnerships and quasi-governmental bodies. This makes the policy-making process much harder to

pin-point. Rhodes' (1990) policy networks approach suggests that the policy process is centred on interrelated, inter-organisational, interdependent policy networks. The characteristics of these groups are changeable and in later work were categorised into: policy communities that are tight knit, have limited memberships and have relatively balanced power relationships and policy networks, which are looser, larger groups whose focus and shared interests are broader and less influential (Marsh and Rhodes 1992). Policy networks and particularly policy communities are influential in constraining or shaping policy outcomes as they are able to resist government's attempts at imposing unwanted policy and constrain the pace of change (John 2012).

Although there are many criticisms of the details of the networks approach they have led to adaptations and developments of the ideas rather than their dismissal. It is clear that individuals and groups outside of government influence the policy-making process and case studies provided by network analysts show how the strength of the particular community or network is linked to the level of this influence (Hudson and Lowe 2009). It is also acknowledged that those working within policy communities or networks are also working with and within their surroundings, so any analysis of policy development using the policy network approach should also be aware of the wider context.

Those individuals operating within networks are also working with external factors that will influence the nature of their actions. Changes in the economy, media focus and pressure, research evidence and crisis events all shape the context of action (John 2012). Many of these factors may be unpredictable and change may

be rapid. These external factors have the potential to shape the policy process at a practical day to day level. For example, there can be relatively rapid and reactionary policy changes in response to a crisis, and more fundamental changes can occur in response to changes in the global economy, leading to longer term changes in national economic policy which in turn impact on public policy-making. Policy is made in context and much of this context is provided by exogenous events.

A less tangible but no less important influence on the policy-making process is that of ideas. Ideas, arguments and debates shape and form the basis of individual action, institutional approaches and policy networks. The influence of ideas can be seen in: political ideology, examples of policy transfer, the outputs of think tanks and the increased commitments to evidence-based policy-making (Hudson and Lowe 2009, Dorey 2005, John 2012, Cairney 2012). In the area of social policy, arguments and debates about the problems that need to be addressed and the best way to address them, the role of government in different areas of policy-making and the role of individuals in addressing their own needs, are all central in the policy process. These ideas inform individual action as well as shaping the wider institutional context. In these contexts, ideas may be seen as paradigms “...the most established ways for people to understand their environment. Paradigmatic ideas are taken for granted and acted upon with little further thought” (Cairney 2012 p.15). Ideas can represent both a constraint on policy development and a dynamic catalyst for policy change. Debates about whether it is the ideas themselves or their use that shape policy are important in highlighting the difficulty of differentiating between the wide range of influential factors.

Theories that put forward structures, groups, individuals, ideas or external events as the most significant factors in the policy-making process can all produce examples and case studies that 'prove the theory to be correct' but individually they cannot explain the full range of complexity in the policy-making process:

...the behaviour of policy makers, the problems they face, the actors they meet and the results of their decisions often vary remarkably. They often vary by region, political system, over time and from policy issue to issue. (Cairney 2012 p.4)

If it is accepted that policy varies between sectors and nations and time periods, it would seem easy for researchers to use the most appropriate theory depending on the policy area under discussion. John (2012) warns against taking this approach though, and, instead, suggests that using models which integrate and synthesise the approaches are the most helpful way forward. As will be shown in section 3.4, Kingdon's streams model makes this acknowledgment and provides a framework within which to understand the importance of context in the process of policy-making.

2.3 Policy Implementation

In response to the dominance of the academic focus on the policy-making process, the 1970s saw the emergence of a new focus on the implementation aspect of the policy process with the publication of the work of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973). Although the title of implementation studies was new, it is now clear that

implementation had been the focus of much academic work before, but had not been seen as a collective body of work (Hill and Hupe 2009, Hill 2009, Saetren 2005). Up until this point the majority of academic studies focused on the idea that the important work went on at central level and that there was a simple progression from the development of a policy to its enactment at the front-line. Once a policy had been developed at the centre it was passed to administrators to be executed; implementation studies attempted to show the significance of the implementation phase on the success or failure of programmes (Barrett 2004).

2.3.1 Top-down approaches

The initial focus of implementation studies came out of concerns over the failure of policy, and the way in which national policy was corrupted or blocked as it was implemented at local level, this deficit approach often focused on single cases of 'policy failure' (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973, Derthick 1972, Murphy 1973, Bardach 1977). The focus of many of the early studies were policies aimed at addressing big social problems (initially U.S based) and gave a pessimistic view of government's ability to effectively implement policy.

Building on the disadvantages of this first wave approach (Sabatier 1986), the next wave of academic studies took a more 'constructive approach'. It addressed variations in implementation and attempted to develop models and frameworks of successful implementation (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975, Sabatier and Mazmanian 1979, Mazmanian and Sabatier 1980). These models showed the importance of the implementation phase of the policy-making process, but still focused on a top-down linear approach and aimed to improve the transmission

from central to local and provide a model of perfect policy implementation.

Criticisms of the top-down approach challenged the assumption that those working at the centre were more important than those implementing at the front-line. This assumption led to top-down models underestimating the ability of front-line workers to get around or change policy at a local level. In addition, the top-down models could not be applied to policy areas that did not have a dominant and distinct policy, areas where a number of policies or agendas overlapped (Sabatier 1986, Schofield 2001).

2.3.2 Bottom-up approaches

The bottom-up approach developed in response to these criticisms emphasising the reality of policy implementation rather than the top-down utopian ideal. Research from this perspective aimed to give an insight into the working of policy and the influence of human agency at the front line level (Hudson and Lowe 2004). These studies start with the local actors in a particular area and link back to government policy. Approaching implementation in this way allows for the analysis of public sector front-line workers and other non government actors, such as private and voluntary sector workers, who increasingly deliver policy. The bottom-up approach also had the advantage of looking beyond the intended outcome of policy to see the unintended (positive and negative) outcomes that develop at the front-line. It is clearly able to study the intersection of policy in related fields; in contrast to the top-down deficit models, many of the bottom-up studies showed that success was often reliant on local actors rather than central government initiatives and policy (Sabatier 1986, Hupe and Hill 2007).

One of the most well known studies to look at the influence of human agency on policy implementation was Lipsky's study of street level bureaucracy (1980), which showed that the use of discretion by front-line staff had a significant impact on how policy was implemented. A shallow reading of the work could be used to support the top-down approach of blaming those implementing policy for sabotaging it at local level but in fact Lipsky argued that in the face of difficult circumstances (for example, lack of clarity or resources in front line services), street level bureaucrats acted in ways that allowed them to 'get through' and do what they could to enable the policy to succeed (Hill and Hupe 2009). This use of discretion by front-line workers is seen as of equal importance as the centrally conceived policy as it is the version of policy constructed by the street level bureaucrats that represents the lived experience of service users.

The bottom-up approach is not unproblematic and also gives a one-sided exploration of the implementation process (Hicklin and Godwin 2009). The main difficulties are related to the reliance on individual's perception of their role and the context within which they operate. Although these perceptions are valid in their own right, focusing solely on them runs the risk of overemphasising the importance of the periphery and excluding, possibly highly influential, factors beyond the individual actors' perception (Sabatier 1986, Schofield 2001, Hicklin and Godwin 2009). Nonetheless, there is no doubt that a full exploration of the policy process must include analysis of interpretations of policy by front-line workers.

The simplistic description of the top-down and bottom-up dichotomy hides a wide-ranging debate about the role of structures, individuals, networks, conflict and

power in the policy implementation phase that has been ongoing in a range of academic areas for over 20 years (see Barrett 2004, Schofield 2001, Saetren 2005). Clearly, as highlighted earlier, ideas, models and theories are unlikely to apply to all types of policy. A linear transmission of clear policy aims and objectives with little or no discretion by front line staff is desirable in some areas of policy for example, war or health and safety (Barrett 2004, John 2003, Hill 2009). In other areas and certainly in the area under discussion in this thesis, the policy aims, objectives and procedures are likely to be much more fluid and likely to involve and even encourage more discretion from welfare professionals (Schofield 2001).

As it became clear that the top-down and bottom-up approaches were dealing with different issues with valid methods, there were attempts to synthesise them (Elmore 1978, 1979, Sabatier 1986). These models provided some relief to the debate and sparked new interest in implementation studies; however, in some cases they were overly complicated as they attempted to provide overarching frameworks to cover all aspects of public policy from both the top and bottom. In such cases it may be more useful to look for partial theories that apply to specific types of policy rather than to develop overarching frameworks that are too complex to apply (Winter 2009, Hill 2009).

2.3.3 Changes in implementation context

Change within implementation studies was hastened by changes in the systems being studied. Many of the original models and frameworks were based on a unitary state model of government, towards the end of a period in the UK of high expectation of what government should and could do (Hill and Hupe 2009). As the

interventionist post-war state became 'overloaded', a process of retrenchment and hollowing out was undertaken (Skelcher 2000) and the themes of New Public Management increasingly became the focus of implementation studies (Barrett 2004). The election of the New Labour government in 1997 saw the model of governance shift again, with the government taking a larger and more interventionist role in a range of issues (Hill and Hupe 2009). It also developed a more horizontal type of Governance based on collaborative and partnership working at central and local level, that developed into what is described by Skelcher (2000) as the 'congested state'. As part of their modernisation agenda (explored more fully in the following chapters), New Labour aimed to 'join up' the policy-making process within and between central and local levels (Cabinet Office 1999). By shifting decision making to the implementation phase and encouraging those involved in service delivery to become involved in developing and interpreting policy, it was hoped to improve the process of policy-making.

The notion that policy is made specifically to be designed and or interpreted by individuals working at the implementation stage, working in partnership, challenges many of the top-down and bottom-up ideas, including those of Lipsky. It is in the context of these changes that a number of writers have suggested that Lipsky's work on street level bureaucracy needs to be revisited (Durose 2011, Petchey et.al 2008, Prior and Barnes 2011). Lipsky's revelation that front-line workers were reflexive subjects who actually interpreted policy and shaped policy outcomes, sometimes in ways contrary to the intended outcomes but in line with their own values and understandings, was seen as a significant break with academic

understandings at the time (Prior and Barnes 2011). However Lipsky's work was based on a model of hierarchy and silo working where the implementation of policy was seen as simply the enactment of the wishes of those in authority (Durose 2011). In the new model of Governance not only were expectations changed, but those individuals involved in policy implementation were also new, with a much stronger emphasis on community involvement. Many policies put in place under the New Labour governments were in this model, but it will be shown that although this may have meant that the role of 'street level bureaucrats' changed, the actions of a wider range of individual agents still had a significant impact on policy implementation.

2.4 Kingdon's Streams Model of Policy-making

It is clear then, that there are a range of approaches that can be taken when analysing policy. At the heart of many of these approaches are discussions about the decisive role played by structures or individuals and the dominance of one set of influential factors over another. This thesis will use Kingdon's (1995) streams model as the basis for analysis as it is broad enough to include many aspects of the approaches described above (relating to policy-making and implementation), including ideas about the roles of structure and agency. The model provides a framework that has a great deal of flexibility which means it can account for differences in policy areas, geographical locations and time-frames and provide a structure which can organise the complexity of the policy-making process.

Kingdon's (1995) policy streams model is a well known and comprehensive model of the policy-making process. Conducted over a number of years, the research used

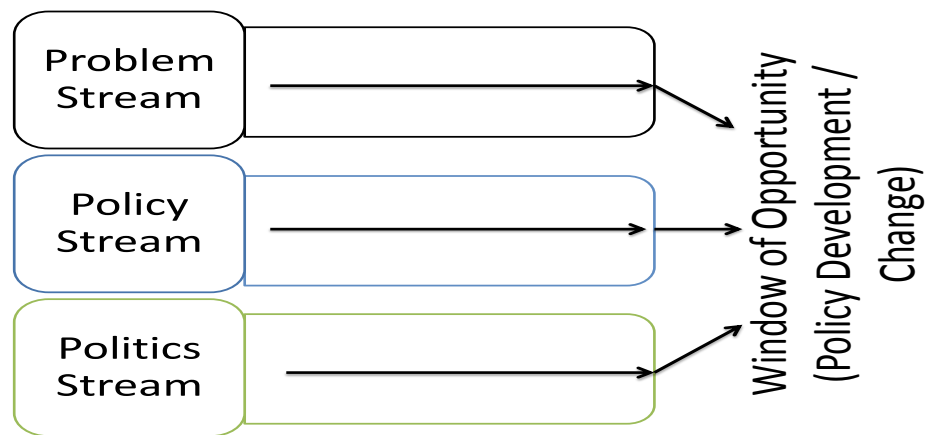
a series of interviews with key personnel in and around the United States Federal government connected to transportation or health policy. He investigated how and why issues became important and prominent at certain times and how decisions were made as to which of these were transferred into policy (1995). First published in 1984, it marked a distinct move away from existing explanations of the way policy was developed but did not necessarily dismiss these ideas. Primarily Kingdon argues that there are a range of different things going on at different points in the policy-making process, but the complexity and context (both subject and time) specific nature of these influences could not be solely accounted for by existing theories. Kingdon continued to hold this position when the second edition of the work was published in 1995 taking into account further developments in the academic field.

Although Kingdon's (1995) model is generally discussed in terms of agenda setting (often by Kingdon himself) he identifies two distinct and closely related stages in the whole policy process. These are:

- agenda setting where ideas are accepted onto the government agenda; when they move from being issues to being problems to be dealt with by government
- alternative selection where the specifics of policy are decided; how the issues on the agenda will be addressed.

The most widely discussed element of Kingdon's model is his division of the policy-making process into three streams, the problem, the policy and the political streams (each will be discussed in detail below). In its simplest form, each stream develops

simultaneously but at certain points the three streams converge. At this point a window of opportunity occurs that allows a policy to develop. These windows are hard to predict, but Kingdon is clear that the process is not random. For an idea to become policy it must coincide with an appropriate problem that needs to be addressed, as well as appropriate wider circumstances.



(Fig. 2.1 Kingdon's Streams Model)

As Kingdon's model will be used as the framework to analyse the development of the Children's Centre Programme in this thesis the model will be discussed in some detail in the following sections.

2.5 The Problem Stream

The role of the problem stream may appear self evident; a problem must be identified to need policy development. However, social problems, especially complex social problems like persistent poverty, are socially constructed and so there is no clear cut agreement about what constitutes the particular social problem (Connor 2013). As important as the existence of problems is the move to

accept a problem as needing government intervention. Kingdon makes the distinction between conditions and problems, “[c]onditions become defined as problems when we come to believe that we should do something about them” (1995 p.109). It is this shift that is of central importance in the policy-making process.

Kingdon (1995) talks about problems becoming prominent on the government’s agenda in a number of ways, from focusing events (for example, crises or shocking research evidence), from pressure brought by the media or particular interest groups, through feedback from existing programmes at home or abroad, or sometimes problems may be created or emphasised by individual policy-makers eager to implement a particular policy due to personal experiences or beliefs (Dorey 2005). There are, however, a number of other factors that are influential in deciding which problems end up being the focus of government policy and this is sometimes less to do with the problem itself and more connected with the way the problem is framed.

Central to understanding the working of the problem stream is the issue of ambiguity. Zahariadis (2003) suggests that ambiguity exists where: there are many different ways of understanding a problem and where some of those ways are irreconcilable and one set of ideas must dominate others. In these circumstances, which cover the vast majority of social policy issues, “...problems receive attention based on how they are defined by policy participants” (Cairney 2012 p.234).

Part of this process of problem definition is the causal explanation that is developed to explain the problem. This causal narrative (Stone 1989) can cover a range of

natural, individual and / or social, political and economic attributions and each carries with it a range of implications for addressing or bypassing the problem (Connor 2013). The way that causation is framed is central in the process of getting the problem noticed within and outside of the problem stream (Kingdon 2001). Problems that can be shown to have a simple causal link are much easier to accept on the agenda as they are likely to be more straightforward to deal with. Where problems are complex, multi-faceted and perhaps entrenched and no such clear cut cause, and thus solution, is available, it is more likely that the problems will be avoided (Kingdon 1995). In this way then, if a complex problem can be re-framed in such a way to enable a simpler cause to be identified, it is far more likely to be accepted on to the policy-making agenda. This framing is not objective; decisions about what constitutes a 'real' problem and the possible causes of these problems are debated by a range of political actors. In this the role of the wider context is crucial (Pralle 2009, Zahariadis 2003).

2.6 The Policy Stream

The policy stream of Kingdon's model highlights the way in which policy is developed and eventually becomes attached to problems that arise, but shows that there is not a linear connection between the identification of a problem and the development of a solution (Dorey 2005). In a further reference to the complex and messy nature of the policy-making process, Kingdon describes the various policy ideas as existing in a 'primeval soup' (Kingdon 1995), where they are constantly surfacing and either being selected and matched to a problem or rejected and allowed to sink back into the soup. The choice of policy will, like the identification

of the problem, be ideologically led by ideas about both the cause of, and the best way to deal with, identified problems and may also be led by individuals eager to promote one policy over another or by public support for or against a particular policy solution.

The selection of policy from this primeval soup is described by Kingdon as a specific phase in the policy-making process. This alternative selection process is portrayed by Kingdon (1995) as the place where policy begins to be coupled with problems, where policies floating in the soup will surface and be accepted or rejected. The process of policy selection is not unstructured however; there are a number of criteria which Kingdon sees as being especially important in deciding between the alternative policies available. Policies put forward for consideration must be viable in terms of finance, practical application and acceptance by those seen as specialists in the area concerned. It is also important to note that the decisions about which policies meet which criteria are also likely to be influenced by the political climate. For example, the economic situation is important in determining the financial viability of a policy solution, however the decision to fund a policy solution is very often not connected to the actual amount of money available, but the ideological position of those making the decision in terms of whether the policy is seen as deserving of the money needed. Kingdon discusses tolerable cost a highly subjective term very likely to be driven by ideological factors (Pralle 2008). The acceptance of policy by policy specialists is also a highly subjective term when those making the decision are also the one's deciding who the 'specialist' are. Examples here can be found in education policy, where 'educational experts' often

have very different views from teaching professionals working in the education field. The fact that the criteria described by Kingdon (1995) are subjective does not undermine their usefulness; instead it suggests that the interpretation of the way that policy fits the criteria is a crucial factor here.

2.7 The Political Stream

The policy-making process is not as simple as having a problem identified and a solution put in place. It has been highlighted in the sections above that interpretation and construction of problems and policies are of central importance in both streams. The political climate, position in the political cycle, ideological orientation of the government and the national / public mood are all significant factors in these processes and make up Kingdon's (1995) third stream. The political stream consists of a range of political circumstances, "...party politics and other organised forces such as lobby groups and vested interests" (Exworthy and Powell 2004 p.265), which will determine whether or not the policy will be implemented. Although it clearly covers overtly political influences like election results and ideological positions, Kingdon also applies the term in wider political science terms to cover "any activity related to the authoritative allocation of values or to the distribution of benefits and costs". In addition to politics Kingdon's (1995) political stream covers the influence of the public mood and pressure group campaigns as well as media influence. In reality, it is the combination of these issues that shapes this stream by providing the context in which policy-making is conducted. Although many of these factors will be the same across policy areas, there will be area specific issues that will finely tune the context and thus help to explain consistency

and difference between and within policy areas operating in what appears to be the same political context.

There are some points in Kingdon's discussion of this stream where the US bias and the passing of time make them less significant and there are things, not given high prominence by Kingdon, that in the UK New Labour period are highly significant. It is important to raise these issues at this point as they impact significantly in the application of Kingdon's model to the Children's Centre Programme.

2.7.1 Kingdon's Political Stream in the UK context

Kingdon (1995) aimed to provide a description of the 'rich tapestry' of the US policy-making system and concentrated his research and analysis on that system, while recognising that it was an unusual system in both political and policy development terms (Kingdon 2001). Since its development it has been recognised as a comprehensive model (Hill 2005, John 2012), a tool kit that can be applied to non-US systems (for example Keskitalo et.al 2010, Botterill 2013, Brunner 2008, Riddle 2009, Zahariadis 2003). There are, however, two specific areas where Kingdon's work needs further expansion for it to apply more appropriately to the UK system in the late 1990s. First, Hill (2005) highlights that the nature of the US system means that Kingdon's work underplays the importance of the politics within the political stream and second his discussion of the influence of the media does not fully emphasise its importance.

The UK parliamentary and policy-making system is distinctly different from the US and issues of a government's mandate, the role of the executive and the role of the

civil service are all extremely significant in the way that agenda setting unfolds.

There are many long standing discussions on where, within the UK system, the policy-making power lies; is it with the prime minister, the cabinet, government departments, or civil servants? The development of 'core executive' studies in the 1980s helped to establish the idea that policy-making power and authority did not sit with any one individual or group of people. Rhodes describes the core executive as:

...all those organisations and procedures which co-ordinate central government policies, and act as final arbiters of conflict between different parts of the government machine...the 'core executive' is the heart of the machine, covering the complex web of institutions, networks, and practices surrounding the prime minister, cabinet, cabinet committees and their official counterparts, less formalised ministerial 'clubs' or meetings, bilateral negotiations and interdepartmental committees. It also includes co-ordinating departments, chiefly the Cabinet Office, the Treasury [and] the Foreign Office. (Rhodes 1995 p.12)

These discussions about the role of different parts of government in the policy-making process developed under the premiership of Tony Blair from 1997, with further questions being raised about what some called a more 'presidential' style of government, with power being centralised and an increasing reliance on special

advisors in place of the civil service (Foley 2000, Kavanagh and Seldon 2008, Gains and Stoker 2011). Countering these claims, others (James 2004, Bevir and Rhodes 2006) show how the balance of power in the core executive is more one of interdependence and a range of domestic, personal and international factors enhance or limit the individual power of any one of the elements.

At the same time, there is little disagreement that the UK electoral system is important in understanding the overall influence of the party in power. Although a coalition government is in place at the time of writing, this situation is unusual in UK politics. A more usual scenario is one where the party that wins power is relatively free to deal with only those problems that they interpret as being problematic and to implement policies that fit with their particular view of appropriate solutions. In highlighting the impact of parliamentary type systems on the policy-making process Zahariadis shows how:

The heads of government (prime ministers) are usually heads of their respective parties, which implies that they have a vested interest in adopting solutions long advocated by their party because they have been involved in formulating them long before they assumed power. Executive power is fused with legislative majority, combined with strong partisan discipline, and both reduce the number of policy makers involved in making decisions. (2003 p.16)

The UK system is very different to the one described by Kingdon (1995), but it is still possible to apply his model to the UK. Kingdon describes the political stream in wide terms and is very clear that different parts of the stream are more significant in different parts of the policy-making process. The stream provides the wider context for policy development so by re-framing the political stream around the UK system it allows the model to be used in the new context.

The second point that Hill (2005) raises as needing further attention in the UK context is the role of the media. Although Kingdon (1995) acknowledges the impact of the media on public opinion and the fact that individual actors use the media to push their own particular agenda, evidence from his research suggested that the media was not perceived to have a significant impact on the wider policy-making process. The reason for this could be connected to the areas of policy that Kingdon focused on (for example, Boykoff and Boykoff (2007) show that in the case of climate change policy, media is seen as a significant player in the policy process in the US), or to the nature of the media in the US or simply to the inaccurate perception of those interviewed. Whatever the reason in the UK this is simply not the case. The media, most particularly the print media, are significant in all three of Kingdon's streams in the UK context. It identifies problems, promotes or dismisses policy ideas and supports and validates the current government or opposition parties (Hill 2005). In the post 1997 period, the role and significance of the media became even more important as the New Labour government attempted to re-define the relationship between government and the media (Franklin 1999, Dean 2013). By the 1997 election, six out of the ten daily UK newspapers were

supporting the election of a Blair government, a significant shift from previous years where the majority of daily newspapers showed strong support for the Conservative party (Franklin 1999). Interestingly, this shift may not have necessarily represented the shift in thinking that it suggested as the majority of newspapers remained substantially right-wing in their outlook (Seaton and Curran 2003). Instead, the shift may have represented a frustration with the Major government and their failures, alongside the perceived shift in the position of the Labour party to a more centre-left party that would now be willing to accept a number of neo-liberal principles. Nonetheless, more recent events raised through the Leveson enquiry (2012) have highlighted even more clearly how the close relationship between certain parts of the media and the UK government proved significant in shaping policy (see Dean 2013 for full overview).

2.7.2 The National Mood

The national mood is an important and complex element in the political stream, noted by Kingdon (1995) as...

[an] idea [that] goes by different names – the national mood, the climate in the country, changes in public opinion, or broad social movements. But common to all of these labels is the notion that a rather large number of people out in the country are thinking along certain common lines...and that these changes in mood or climate have important impacts on policy agendas and policy outcomes (p.146).

The influence of the national mood or public opinion within the political stream is difficult to pinpoint, not least because it is difficult to say exactly what constitutes the national mood. Kingdon's (1995) work contains many examples of participants talking about a general acceptance or a general feeling of dissatisfaction with certain policy ideas but he stresses that these comments were difficult to justify or explain. Identifying whose opinion 'public opinion' represents is also difficult, as information is gained through opinion polls, MPs contact with constituents, pressure groups and public demonstrations and, as highlighted above, the media. For New Labour public opinion was highly important (Bevir and Rhodes 2006) and for a party in transition from a position on the political left to a third way centre-left party, gaining a wider range of public support was also highly important. In this sense, then, the nature of the national mood became less important than how the government saw it. In many ways, New Labour's majority in the House of Commons meant that they could, in effect, pass any legislation that they chose. However, the New Labour project was a long term one and retaining public support was seen as important.

2.8 Process and Participants

Kingdon's (1995) streams model provides a framework for understanding the different aspects of the policy-making process and their interaction. Another element in Kingdon's model, discussed in the literature, specifically, to a lesser degree, is the way that process and participants are active within each of the streams. The processes that Kingdon describes are those things that may lead towards or deflect away from certain problems or policies. He lists: focusing events

(high profile events that focus the public or political arena), changes in indicators, shifts in public opinion driven by events not directly linked to the problem or policy being considered (unexpected consequences of other policies), changes in administrations (governments), wider institutional factors (major restructuring of policy areas, or changes in governance). These process elements can be seen as structural issues and a variety of combinations of these things impact and influence all three of the streams that Kingdon describes.

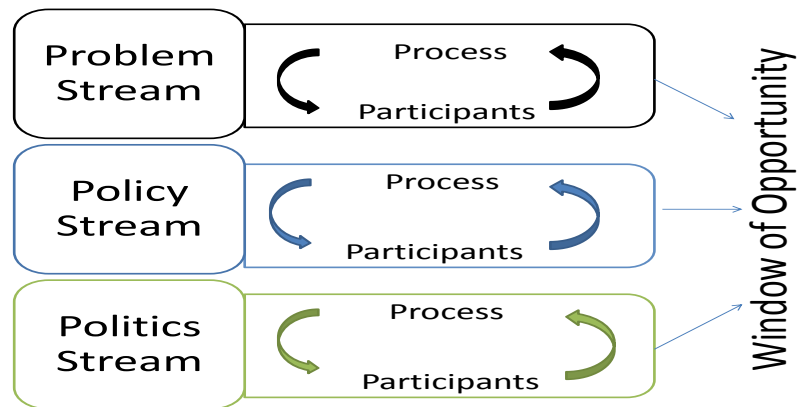
Alongside these process factors are participant factors. Ideas, presentation and interpretation of evidence, development of policy ideas, discussions had and decisions made at meetings are all actions taken by individuals. Although in many cases their actions will be influenced by the wider structural processes it would be ridiculous to suggest that individual or agential factors do not play a significant part in the process. There are some suggestions that as participants are so integral to the process elements of policy development looking at them individually is not necessary (Zahariadis 2003), however it is argued here that individual participants shape specific parts of the wider policy-making context and as such it is useful to consider them as separate to the process elements in each stream.

The most well known phrase associated with these participants is the 'policy entrepreneur'. Kingdon (1995) identifies policy entrepreneurs as more significant than others in terms of their drive and commitment to a particular problem or policy. These individuals, for a variety of reasons, will invest a great deal of time and energy in promoting their cause. These individuals operate in a range of capacities both inside and outside of government as civil servants, campaigners,

ministers, prime ministers and advisors. In contrast to other approaches that try to allocate power and influence to either particular individuals or roles, Kingdon categorises participants into visible and hidden groups each of which is more or less significant in different aspects of the process. He suggests that at the agenda setting phase where broad ideas are accepted onto the government's agenda, visible participants like the prime minister are highly significant. In the process of selecting policy (alternative selection) a range of hidden individuals; civil servants, and junior ministers are more important. In addition it is also important to recognise the impact that an individual's inaction or resistance can have within the process. There may be individuals who actively attempt to minimise problems, undermine policy or simply fail to act at crucial times which result in opportunities being missed (Pralle 2009).

All participants or individuals will have differing levels of influence on the policy-making process and indeed at the site of implementation (Durose 2011) but all work within the wider context of the political stream. Policy entrepreneurs must monitor the wider political climate and act decisively when the 'time is right'.

Clearly there are many issues here connected to power and influence but Kingdon's research suggests that just as important is people being in the 'right place at the right time'. This idea is supported by other research based on Kingdon's (1995) model; using case studies to explore the drivers of policy change and stability these studies show individuals using similar evidence to push policy in different contexts achieving very different results (Botterill 2013, Keskitalo et.al 2012).



(Fig. 2.2 The Role Of Process and Participants in the Streams Model)

The diagram above shows how Kingdon's model provides a framework which incorporates the whole range of influential elements in the policy-making process. Studying the detail of policy development highlights that it is rarely clear cut or fully predictable (although this will vary depending on the type of policy being discussed). When discussing the range of issues covered by public policy it is inevitable that both problems and policy will develop in different ways at different times (Hill 2009) and so context is extremely important.

The complex nature of Kingdon's theory with the intersection of streams alongside the actions of individuals and the wider structures that impact on actors and actions have led to criticisms suggesting that Kingdon's work portrays policy formation as a random process (Mucciaroni 1992). On the contrary, the framework acknowledges and incorporates elements which provide structure to the process; selection criteria, dominant ideologies and institutional structures are all central to the framework that Kingdon (1995) provides. The appearance of randomness arises from the acknowledgment that both structural and agential factors are

changeable and have different levels of influence in different contexts but Kingdon strongly refutes the claim that policy-making is completely random or fortuitous:

For instance, none of the following factors are random: which participants are invited to a meeting, which solutions are in the queue with what timing, whether a solution is available at the time that a problem is pressing, what makes some problems more pressing than others, which proposals survive in the policy primeval soup and which die away, and which proposals get joined to which problems (Kingdon 1995 p.222).

Kingdon (1995) addresses the criticisms raised and explains that the portrayal of the policy-making process is not meant to be random, only fluid. He uses the analogy of a river to describe the workings of each stream; the boundaries of the river bank provide a structure but within those banks the movement of the water is fluid. In the same way the problem, policy and political stream are also structured by wider factors but within those boundaries movement is fluid. Heffernan's (2002) work on policy paradigms can be drawn on here to further explain the wider factors or river banks that Kingdon describes.

Heffernan (2002) stresses the importance of the ideological paradigm that is dominant in the policy-making process describing it as the overarching factor which sets the parameters within which political actors form their ideas and policies. The dominant paradigm sets the boundaries of how problems are defined, what policy

steps can be taken to address the problem and what the desired outcomes of the policy intervention are. At a macro level it is a set of ideas, a position on the purpose and objectives of government (Hudson and Lowe 2009, Dorey 2005). This dominant paradigm is significant in all three of Kingdon's streams further highlighting the complexity of the process but challenging the idea of policy-making being completely random. There are two dominant paradigms that have existed in the UK since the creation of the welfare state in 1945. The first is the collectivist / social democratic paradigm which influenced and was influenced by the war time experience and the subsequent creation of the welfare state. The second is the neo-liberal paradigm which emerged and developed during the 1980s and is still in place at the time of writing. A dominant policy paradigm does not however lead to consensus politics where consensus is defined as policy agreement in all areas. Heffernan (2002) argues that the paradigm sets the overarching ideology but there is a great deal of scope for differences in ideas and policy; any ideological paradigm covers a considerably wide space on the political spectrum so it is possible to have what appear to be very different political viewpoints existing in the same overarching paradigm; the paradigm can be seen to be the banks of the river that Kingdon (1995) describes.

Connected to these discussions are concerns that Kingdon's' model cannot be used in a predictive way. Due to the unpredictability and context specific nature of the model it is not possible to use it to determine the best way to develop policy or even the best way to avoid failures in policy development (Mucciaroni 1992, Robinson and Eller 2010). If this is indeed the case the model becomes a backwards

looking descriptive model which has little use in the field of policy-making.

Kingdon's response to these criticisms is to suggest that the model is not deterministic but instead it can be seen as probabilistic as this allows for some predictive use but also allows for "residual randomness" (1995 p225). The model can be used to identify conditions and significant elements but it cannot provide a blueprint for perfect policy development due to the fact that in real life there will always be an element of uncertainty and unpredictability.

2.9 Joining of the Streams

To explain why some policies are developed and others are not Kingdon describes the opening of a 'window of opportunity'. Kingdon (1995) emphasises that the problem, policy and political streams are independent of each other. They flow and develop at their own pace until at a certain point all three streams come together, a window of opportunity opens and policy can be enacted. This window opens when:

... a problem is recognised, a solution is developed and available in the policy community, a political change makes it the right time for policy change and potential constraints are not severe (Kingdon 1995 p.165).

This window of opportunity or policy window is opened by significant changes in the problem or political stream but all three streams must join for the window to result in policy change. Kingdon's work on the health care and transportation systems in the US and subsequent research on policy within and outside the US have identified that windows of opportunity opened for a range of reasons. A

particular focusing event, new information or evidence, or simply because a range of factors came together that meant 'the time was right' in political terms (Farley et.al 2007, Lieberman, J. 2002, Botterill 2013, Brunner 2008, Pralle 2009). Kingdon is vague on how long the window remains open but insists on a number of occasions that it is time limited supporting the idea that everything must be ready to go:

An idea's time arrives not simply because the idea is compelling on its own terms, but because opportune political circumstances favour it. At those moments when a political idea finds persuasive expression among actors whose institutional position gives them both the motive and the opportunity to translate it into policy – then, and only then, can we say that an idea has found its time (Lieberman, R. 2002, p.709).

At times there are attempts at coupling or partial couplings before the window of opportunity has opened as, for example, changes in the political stream might lead to shifts in the policy stream or, public recognition of issues in the problem stream may influence the political stream. These partial connections between the streams are not necessarily co-ordinated and are unlikely to lead to policy change but they may provide part of the process of 'softening up'. This process raises the profile of particular sorts of problems or policy solutions and opens debate that make the acceptance of a policy much more likely 'when the time is right' (Botterill 2013), leading to smoother policy change at a later date (Kingdon 1995).

It is the nature of this joining of the streams and Kingdon's assertion that the window of opportunity is unpredictable and often occurs 'when the time is right' that has led to further criticisms of the model as being inaccurate (Mucciaroni 1992) as in some areas of policy it can be shown that change is incremental and clearly structured. Interestingly these points are indeed true; there are a number of examples where policy appears to develop rationally or incrementally (Hill 2005, Hudson and Lowe 2009). However, these examples do not diminish the significance of Kingdon's approach as he acknowledges that policy-making occurs in different ways in different areas of policy and suggests that the ease or difficulty of the joining is dependent on the specifics of the three streams; the context (Zahariadis 1998). Where the types and understandings of problems and solutions create a context of ambiguity, that is, where there is significant and sustained disagreements around problems and solutions, the policy-making process is likely to be far less straightforward and far more fluid than where little or no ambiguity exists (Zahariadis 1998, Robinson and Eller 2010).

Developing Kingdon's model further Zahariadis (2003) suggests that the driving force behind the window of opportunity is more significant in shaping policy development than is sometimes acknowledged. Where the window is opened by changes in the problem stream the development of policy can be seen to be more consequential; the problem is identified (or re-identified) and appropriate policy is applied. Where the window of opportunity opens as a result of changes in the political stream, it is suggested that, the process becomes ideologically driven and implementing a policy solution often precedes a full definition or exploration of the

problem to be addressed. The application of Kingdon's model to a range of policy areas in a range of different countries supports this point. A number of case studies (Lieberman, J. 2002, Farley et.al 2007, Keskitalo et.al 2012, Brunner 2008, Pralle 2009, Ridde 2009, Zahariadis 1998, 2003, 2007) show that policy change and development, both successful and not, is highly context specific.

Although the version of the window of opportunity described above is the most well used, Kingdon (1995) also highlights how a window of opportunity can be used to set down and establish a principle which can then form the basis of a wider ranging policy change. This type of policy window is often opened by changes in the political stream that lead to policy changes. Initially, the policy changes may appear quite small but the window sets a precedent. In Kingdon's terminology the window of opportunity can change the boundaries of the problem and policy stream so that from this point onwards:

...arguments surrounding the policy [area] are couched in different terms... people become accustomed to the new way of doing things and build the new policies into their standard operating procedures (Kingdon 1995p.191).

The closing of the policy window does not then have to mean the end of change in the policy area. It will be shown in subsequent chapters that the election of the New Labour government in 1997 was the catalyst to the opening of a policy window that provided opportunities for a range of principles to be established that impacted on the development of policy for many years (Annesley et.al 2010).

This section of the chapter has given an in-depth overview of Kingdon's streams model. It has shown how the many and varied aspects of Kingdon's work provide a framework for understanding the way that problems, policies and political factors come together and lead to policy change. The model is not simple, and does not claim to provide a template of policy-making, instead it provides a framework that can be used to understand continuity and change in the policy-making process. By acknowledging the wide range of factors that are important in the policy-making process at central level, both process and participant led, the model shows how it is the interaction of elements that is the most significant factor in understanding why some policy gets enacted and some does not. The final section of this chapter will look at how the model can be extended.

2.10 Kingdon and Policy Implementation

2.10.1 Existing application of Kingdon's model to implementation

Kingdon's model was explicitly developed to explain and explore the policy-making process at central level and makes no mention of policy implementation. A small number of writers have, however, made this connection (Exworthy et. al 2002, Exworthy and Powell 2004, Mannheimer et.al 2007, Ridde 2009). Two of these examples focus on UK policy. Exworthy et.al (2002) attempted to synthesise theories of agenda setting and implementation into a single model. The development of this joined up model attempted to link implementation studies to other models in the policy literature and also to look at implementation within the new forms of governance. Initially Exworthy et.al (2002) applied Kingdon's streams model to the implementation level as well as the central agenda setting level in the

field of policy to address health inequality. This work highlighted that if the joining of streams that leads to windows of opportunity at central level also occurs at local level there is a much higher chance of successful policy implementation. Extending these ideas in a later paper (based on the work of Kingdon 1995, Wolman 1981 and Challis et al. 1988), Exworthy and Powell (2004) introduce the concept of 'little windows' highlighting the need to look beyond Kingdon's 'big windows' at central level. They suggest that the policy stream described by Kingdon (1995) needs to be further broken down into policy, process and resources and show that for a policy to be successful all three policy streams need to be in line. They also provide a framework that takes into account the way policy is developed and the channels that are used to implement. In line with new styles of governance they incorporate both linear and joined up approaches. Their model shows how streams must come together both vertically (central to local) and horizontally at central and local levels to ensure successful policy implementation. This model, looking jointly at policy development and implementation is highly significant in this study of the Children's Centre Programme as it shows that there is a two-way interaction between central and local. Local implementation factors impact on central policy-making as much as central direction impacts on implementation.

Mannheimer et. al (2007) focus on the implementation of an aspect of public health policy in Sweden and again use Kingdon's model to analyse the local implementation of a nationally devised policy. The case study also extends the idea of Kingdon's window of opportunity suggesting that discussions of the window being open or closed are too simplistic. Instead the case study shows how at the

local level (little) windows can be open, closed or half open leading to different levels of implementation and success. The drivers of how open or closed the windows are in line with Kingdon's discussions of central policy making; understanding and acceptance of the problem, common understandings of the best approach to deal with the identified problem and the support given to the issue by local actors (Mannheimer et.al 2007 p. 312-313). The case study also highlights how significant the practical issues of implementation are for opening the window of opportunity for example how well actors know each other and work together and the size the local area.

Ridde's (2009) work uses Kingdon's model to examine the local implementation of a national health programme based in "...a low income country, Burkina Faso in West Africa" (Ridde 2009 p.938). The work focuses on explaining the factors involved in policy failure and tests a range of Kingdon's propositions at the implementation stage. The work shows how some of Kingdon's general points are supported at the local level for example; all three streams must join to have successful implementation. In this case study the political stream was not supportive enough and it is suggested that this meant that local actors did not seize windows of opportunity that could have led to successful policy development. In addition some of Ridde's findings raised specific issues relating to the context of Burkina Faso and the issues associated with internationally developed programmes implemented nationally in settings that are heavily reliant on external aid. Ridde's findings are highly useful in showing the applicability of Kingdon's theory to the implementation stage of policy formation and extend the model in a number of ways.

Overall these applications of Kingdon (1995) to the local implementation stage unintentionally add to the key contribution of this thesis in that the findings are specific to the context in which implementation occurs. These four studies are all useful in establishing Kingdon's model as being useful at local level and add to the ongoing implementation debates. There are however limitations to the existing studies. The fact that all focus on aspects of health policy limits their ability to show Kingdon as a universal model (John 2012) but it will of course take time and many other studies in a wide variety of policy settings to firmly establish this. The focus on the window of opportunity and successful vs. unsuccessful policy implementation is also problematic as it does not fully utilize Kingdon's model. As highlighted above even when used to understand central policy making and development it is often the window of opportunity that is the sole focus of research. This is an important aspect however it does not provide a wide enough base for a full and comprehensive exploration of Kingdon's streams model.

2.10.2 Application of Kingdon's model to local implementation of the Children's Centre Programme

The application of Kingdon's (1995) model to the local implementation of the Children's Centre Programme will not focus on identifying the route to successful policy implementation. Instead it will look at how Kingdon's model can be used to understand the importance of context in shaping implementation of centrally devised programmes. The strength of Kingdon's (1995) model is in its acceptance of fluidity within the processes it describes and it is this which makes it appropriate to apply at the local implementation stage.

The three streams of problem, policy and politics are still applicable at local level. Although the problem and policy solution may already have been decided at central level the interpretation and application of these elements are in part determined by local factors (Exworthy et.al 2004). The political stream (both central and local) is also highly important in the implementation process. Clearly the political control of the local council will influence the level of commitment that they have towards policies developed at central level but other things like the heritage, history, and economic position of the area will all be important in determining the way policy is implemented (Wilson and Game 2006). Kingdon's ideas of the interaction of process and participants will also shape the way policy is implemented as although policy development is often seen in collective terms, the reality is that:

..collective choices are not merely the derivatives of individual efforts aggregated in some fashion but rather the combined result of structural forces and cognitive processes that are highly context dependent (Zahariadis 2003 p.2).

Many of the processes in the local political stream, like the heritage of the local authority and economic situation will heavily influence the decisions made about implementation, but centrally imposed processes will also shape the nature of implementation. In the period under discussion the New Labour government embarked on a programme of modernisation which involved changing the relationship between central and local government and attempting to re-establish trust in local decision makers and policy implementers (Cabinet Office 1999).

Programmes of community development, local devolution and area based initiatives all changed the way that policy was developed and implemented.

Alongside these institutional factors a range of individuals at local authority and front-line level act and react in a variety of ways which alter outcomes. Both Lipsky (1980) and Kingdon (1995) in their discussions of agential factors identify a particular group of individuals, Street Level Bureaucrats and Policy Entrepreneurs who are central to the agential influence of the policy process. As highlighted above, recent discussions (Durose 2011, Petchey et.al 2008, Prior and Barnes 2011) suggest that within the new governance arrangements a wider range of individuals have an impact on outcomes. Alongside Street Level Bureaucrats (as conceptualised by Lipsky 1980) there are others who work to further, or limit, policy implementation by impacting on the process whereby streams are joined, suggesting that implementation will differ in each local authority or area. By extending Kingdon's (1995) notion of policy entrepreneur to the local site of implementation it will be possible to build on Lipsky's (1980) work and fully acknowledge the wider range of individuals who are now influential in the implementation of policy.

The nature of this agential action within local structures means that it is hard to predict the outcome of specific policies, but in the same way that Kingdon (1995) shows that there is structure in the process at central level; the same can be said at local level. The success of the joining of the streams at local level is not random but is dependent on the complex interplay of locally specific process and participant (structural and agential) factors.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the theoretical framework on which this thesis will be based. The first part of the chapter gave a brief overview of some of the academic discussions linked to the policy-making process at central level and the implementation of policy at local level. Although there is merit in all of the ideas discussed it was shown that due to the complexity of the policy-making and implementation processes a more synthesised approach was needed.

A discussion of Kingdon's (1995) streams model formed the majority of the rest of the chapter, looking at its application to the UK context at central level and the way in which it can be extended and applied to the local implementation stage. The problem, policy and political streams, and the process and participant elements that interact within, and shape, these streams will form the theoretical base for the following chapters as the thesis analyses the development of the Children's Centre Programme in England.

Essentially, at the heart of Kingdon's (1995) model are issues of structure and agency (although he does not use these terms) and the complex interplay between them. There is no suggestion that the model helps to show one as more important than the other, on the contrary, Kingdon emphasises on a number of occasions that the relationship between the process and participants is fluid and the two interact in different ways depending on the area of policy and on the aspect of the process. At the agenda setting phase Kingdon highlights the dominance of high profile visible participants and the strong emphasis of many of the process elements of the political stream (for example, strength of the electoral mandate and public mood).

While at the point of choosing between policy alternatives, the participants involved are likely to be much less visible (junior ministers and civil servants), working within the process elements related to the policy stream, for example applying policy viability criteria. In this way Kingdon's work shows how the relationship between structure and agency is not fixed. Furthering Kingdon's reasoning at the local implementation stage the outcome of the policy is likely to be driven by the local context, made up of key processes within the political stream, and key individuals who are in a position to interpret policy direction from central level. The next three chapters will explore these relationships at each of the three stages of policy-making in order to fully understand the way that the Children's Centre Programme developed.

Chapter 3

Agenda Setting – Cycles of Disadvantage and Persistent Poverty

3.1 Introduction

Kingdon (1995) describes the agenda setting phase of the policy process, in its simplest terms, as the way in which “...some subjects become prominent on the policy agenda and other do not.” (p3). Clarifying the use of the term agenda he describes it as “...the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time.” (p3). There is an acknowledgement that there are different levels of agenda items some much broader and wide ranging and others much more particular to specific policy areas. In the case of the Children’s Centre Programme, discussed in this thesis, the underlying problem linked to the programme can be identified as the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty. This chapter will address the first research objective of the thesis; *to identify the range of factors that drove New Labour’s understanding of, and policy responses to, the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage in families with children*, showing how this problem became established on the New Labour government agenda.

First, the problem itself will be discussed with a section that highlights historical and contemporary conceptualisations of the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty. It is important to understand the nature of the problem discussed as Kingdon (1995) shows how the construction or framing of a problem is

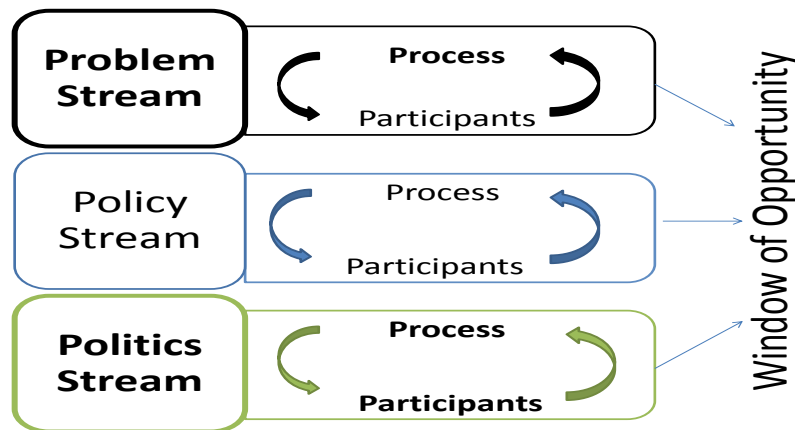
essential in understanding why problems come and go from agendas. Essentially, this section will review debates in the problem stream.

Secondly the chapter will identify the broad theoretical positions that were influential in shaping the New Labour government approach in this particular area. The Third Way ideology, ideas of structuration and notions of social investment were all crucial elements in shaping the political stream.

Thirdly the chapter will show how the political stream impacted on the problem stream; how the third way ideology and commitments to ideas of structuration and social investment alongside the input of key actors within this stream allowed the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty to be framed in such a way that it became firmly established on the government agenda.

Finally the chapter will show how the strength of the political stream and the changes that it created in the problem stream led to the opening of a window of opportunity which ensured that the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty was established as a problem to be dealt with by government.

As highlighted in the theoretical framework chapter, Kingdon (1995) identifies that within each phase of policy-making a complex interplay occurs. Problem, policy and political streams interact with process and participant elements. This combination is context specific so plays out differently in each policy area. At the agenda setting phase Kingdon (1995) identifies the most significant elements as being the problem stream, the political stream and visible participants.



(Fig. 3.1 Prominent Elements at the Agenda Setting Phase)

The process of establishing the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty on the government agenda, described here, supports this conclusion.

However, in line with the way that context is central to an understanding of the policy-making process, this chapter will show that in this case the political stream was the dominant force driving the ideas and understanding of the agenda item.

3.2 Cycles of Disadvantage and Persistent Poverty – The Problem Stream

Kingdon (1995) highlights a range of ways in which a problem can be identified. A change in issues that are routinely monitored, a crisis or event that brings the problem to a place of high visibility, new research that identifies a new problem, or re-ignites discussion over an older or ongoing discussion. The problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty is not new; the search for the explanation of why children of poor parents grow up to be poor adults has a long history and has been at the centre of social policy debate throughout the twentieth century (Welshman 2007). In the case discussed here, the definition of the problem and the identification of it being something that the government should deal with was

ideologically driven. It will be shown later in this chapter that there is a great deal of ambiguity in this policy area which means that ideas were central in the framing of the problem (Zahariadis 2007). Initially, the setting up of the welfare state in the late 1940s was seen as a watershed in the fight against poverty and deprivation. Beveridge's report had highlighted the inter-related structural problems of poor housing, poor health, inadequate income protection and poor educational provision, highlighting their role in the perpetuation of poverty. State intervention in all areas was seen as the way to eradicate the problems of poverty. Children and families were central to the post war government's plans for social renewal and alongside dealing with structural factors the government also provided a good deal of support for parents and parenting through the Children's Departments (Hendrick 2005). The provision of free secondary education, health care, income security and social care was seen as the way to tackle the problem of persistent poverty in families. The perpetuation of the poverty problem, highlighted by a wave of research in the 1960s, suggested that the welfare state in itself was not enough to prevent intergenerational poverty (Welshman 2007).

The 1970s saw an explicit revival of the link between discussions of deprivation and the role of the family in its perpetuation. The assumption appeared to be that by definition parents living in deprivation were inadequate parents. Discussions suggested that parents who were unable or unwilling to lift their children out of deprivation were by definition 'poor parents' (Jorden 1974). In 1972 the concept of problem parents and parenting was explicitly linked with problems of poverty and given a clear form as the cycle of deprivation (Joseph 1972 in Welshman 2007). In

an attempt to explain the persistence of poverty, even after almost thirty years of the welfare state, Sir Keith Joseph (Secretary of State for Social Security) articulated the view that it was the result of children “inheriting values and lifestyles which lock them into permanent disadvantage” (Gillies 2005a p.72). It was this cycle and a culture of poverty that it promoted that was responsible for the persistent failure of poor children (Deacon 2002). Joseph’s speech placed the problem on the government agenda and made it an issue important enough to invest time and money into discovering the cause of the problem.

A major research programme into cycles of deprivation (re-titled by the academics involved as Cycles of Disadvantage) was set up in 1974 on the recommendation of a working party convened by Sir Keith Joseph. This programme had at its core, ideas about how poverty, deprivation and poor parenting were transmitted through genetics and behaviour from one generation to the next (Brown and Madge 1982). However, much of the research that came out of the programme took a different approach to Joseph’s ideas and focused much more on showing how structural factors also played a major part in the transmission of deprivation and disadvantage (Deacon 2002, Gillies 2005a). In a review of the literature at the beginning of the programme, it was stated that “...neither a wholly sub-cultural nor a wholly situational interpretation of the behaviour and attributes of poor communities is tenable” (Rutter and Madge 1976 P.30). By the end of the research programme in the early 1980s, more questions than answers seemed to have emerged and significantly none of the studies had explained the anomalies in the cycle theory such as the families who started in deprivation but whose children broke the cycle

(Brown and Madge 1982). The experience of this project along with others (for example the Black Report 1980) left a good deal of bad feeling between the Conservative governments of the 1980s and the academic social science community (Welshman 2007) and during the 1980s and 1990s the problem of persistent poverty was not high on the government agenda and was discussed mostly in terms of welfare dependency and underclass debates.

Using Kingdon's (1995) terminology the research programme had shifted the debate within the problem stream moving from a simple conception of the problem (as suggested by Joseph in 1972) to a more complex conception of structural explanations. The research evidence also began to shape the policy stream with some suggestions on how the issue might be dealt with by government. However, during the period of the research programme a range of factors in the political stream (changes in governments, economic concerns, changes in ideological positions and approaches to the role of government), meant that by the time the final report was produced in 1982, the research evidence had no impact on the government agenda (Welshman 2007). The steady growth in the levels of poverty, especially child poverty, and significant increase in geographically specific poverty leading to more intergenerational issues was highlighted consistently throughout the Conservative governments' terms of office. Although acknowledged, the problem was not seen as something that was appropriate for the government to deal with. The 1980s marked the beginning of a shift in the ideological paradigm in the UK and within this Neo-Liberal paradigm the New Right ideology saw the issue of Cycles of Disadvantage as an individual one and not something that government

should or could attempt to address. Two developments were particularly important. First, there was an attempt to change the way that the problem was framed by reverting back to definitions of absolute poverty. Using this measure it was claimed that 'real poverty' did not exist in the UK. Sir Keith Joseph (Secretary of State for Industry) claimed that:

An absolute standard means one defined by reference to the actual needs of the poor and not by reference to the expenditure of those who are not poor. A family is poor if it does not have enough to eat... By any absolute standard there is very little poverty in Britain today (1979 p.27-8 in PSE 2011).

Inequality was acknowledged, but Conservative government ideology supported ideas of 'trickle down', if wealth was created or increased in some areas at the top of society the benefits would eventually trickle down to those at the bottom. Taking these two ideas together meant that the issue of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty were not something that needed to be dealt with by government; the market would provide a natural balance. Within Kingdon's (1995) model then during this period the issue of Cycles of Disadvantage remained an issue and did not become a problem requiring a place on the government agenda.

The short historical overview provided here shows how a broad problem like Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty can rise and fall in prominence during the agenda setting phase and can be framed in a range of ways. The most prominent ideas in the framing of the problem relate to issues of cause and who is to blame.

Debates on structure and agency dominated the research programme described above and were central to preventing the issue becoming a problem for government to deal with. In line with Kingdon's (1995) assertion that streams operate independently of each other, these debates in the problem stream continued even when the issue was not high or even visible on the government agenda.

In a review of literature focusing on the perpetuation of poverty across generations Deacon (2003) highlights five explanations which developed in the academic debate relating to Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty. Acknowledging that much of the debate is American, Deacon (2003) suggests that it is these debates that had led and continued to lead UK social policy. These explanations span the full range of agency and structure debates from the cultural and rational explanations, which place the responsibility firmly with the poor, to the permissive and structural explanations, which see the state as being the cause and the solution to the long-term problems of deprivation. The prominence of these debates in academic, political and public understandings will influence the likelihood of the issue gaining access to the government's agenda. These explanations will be discussed in more detail below however concepts of an underclass are central to all discussions and need to be explored.

The idea of an underclass is not new to the UK. Discussions of the undeserving, immoral, feckless poor have long existed and have always been central to discussions of persistent poverty (Seabrook 2013). Although modern incarnations of the concept were formulated in the US they have been influential in debates in

the UK. Discussions of an underclass replaced debates about Cycles of Disadvantage during the 1980s and were centred on the notion of an identifiable group of people who are particularly marginalised, not simply in economic terms but in cultural and value terms also. The academic debates around the underclass discourse are wide ranging, but can be categorised into two areas of argument. The first is around the use of the term. It is argued that due to the wide range of definitions and measures employed in discussions of the underclass in academic, media and political contexts it's use is limited (Jargowsky and Yang 2006, Lister 1996). However, there is an acknowledgement by some of those who object to the term that the concept of a group of people who experience a significantly different level of isolation, exclusion and disadvantage could be helpful (Lister 1996). What can be seen in these arguments is a call for a less pejorative term, for example social exclusion (Alcock 2006). Although in common use in some European countries, the term Social Exclusion, in the UK, was firmly linked to the New Labour governments from 1997 onwards and it took a central position in the New Labour governments' social policy programme. In one way this shift marked a move towards an understanding of the structural issues involved in Cycles of Disadvantage but it was also important in providing a way for the government to continue underclass discussions without the right wing connotations (Welshman 2006).

The second area of discussion, in the underclass debate, is linked to explanations of the cause of, and the solution to, the problem of the underclass. Interestingly, these arguments although taken up extensively by the media and Conservative

politicians were largely discredited in academic terms by a range of evidence that challenged the flimsy base of underclass theories (Mann 1994 in Gillies 2005b, Wacquant 2008). This said, the threads of the underclass arguments still exist in discussions of persistent poverty and deprivation. For theorists and writers who accept that there is a group of people who may be seen as particularly marginalised the debates centre around why this group exists, which raises essential ideas about agency and structure. Are people passive victims of circumstance or are they flawed or deviant in some way which sets them apart from the rest of society? Although he acknowledges that in reality many ideas overlap, Deacon's (2003) five categories are useful for illustrating these debates, and in turn help in an understanding of the fluidity of the problem stream.

Cultural and Rational explanations accept the concept and terminology of the underclass but suggest different reasons for its existence and persistence. Cultural theories suggest that a 'culture of poverty' exists which is passed in the process of socialisation through families from one generation to the next, this culture spans attitudes and beliefs and establishes cultural patterns that determine life chances. These attitudes are so entrenched that they may prevent people taking advantage of opportunities that are offered, and even if social or economic conditions change the culture may remain (Deacon 2003). Rational explanations developed most notably by Murray (1990) refuse to see members of the underclass as victims of a 'culture of poverty' and suggest that the Cycle of Disadvantage is a result of rational decisions made by individuals. Agency is at the heart of rational explanations of the underclass. This explanation more than the others suggests that the provision of

welfare benefits to unemployed able-bodied men and unmarried mothers is at the heart of the rational decisions made by individuals to live outside of mainstream morals.

Permissive theories of the Cycle of Disadvantage take a more paternalistic approach to the problem. Mead (1997 in Deacon 1997) suggests that the problem of the underclass lies with the state's failure to enforce the obligations of citizenship which allows the development and continuation of destructive lifestyles. Only by the state enforcing the social obligations of citizenship through appropriate behavioural patterns will this cycle be broken. Like rational explanations the solution to the problem lies in the welfare system but rather than removing welfare, Mead (1997) suggests that applying conditionality to welfare is the way to break the Cycle of Disadvantage.

The final two explanations highlighted by Deacon (2003) take a structural approach to the situation. Adaptive explanations recognise the role of agency and suggest that the decisions people make and the lifestyle they lead are active choices but are direct responses to the structural inequalities that they live with. Far from having a fatalistic outlook it is suggested that families trapped in poverty have a realistic outlook in line with their own experiences. Changing the structural factors in neighbourhoods and communities, for example creating employment opportunities and improving infrastructure, is seen as the way to break the Cycle of Disadvantage. Finally Deacon (2003) highlights the structural explanations which deny agency as being influential in any way in the transmission of poverty, and see the Cycle of Disadvantage being the sole outcome of the inequalities in society. This

perspective suggests that all other approaches are variations on victim blaming.

From this perspective a change in the social structure to address issues of inequality is the only way to break the Cycle of Disadvantage.

These debates are ongoing in the problem stream and the use of these ideas will prove crucial in determining whether the issue becomes established on the policy-making agenda. The understanding or interpretation of the causes, and possible solution to the problem, will lead to decisions around whether the problem is, indeed, fixable and if it is the job of government to fix it. With such a range of explanations and understandings of the problem, many of which are diametrically opposed to one another, policy makers are likely to use the debates in the problem stream to support their particular view point rather than evaluating the range of debates available. In this sense then, in line with Zahariadis' (1998,2003,2007) argument discussed in the previous chapter, these debates are not necessarily used to provide more information to policy makers in order for them to make more clearly informed decisions. Although the sorts of changes described by Kingdon (1995), such as new evidence and shocking focusing events, may have an influence in raising awareness of the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty, the way that the problem is conceptualised by policy actors may well be fixed, supported by the appropriate set of debates in the problem stream.

Elements in the political stream will determine how these debates are used and in turn how the problem is framed. These elements will be explored in the next section.

3.3 Influential Theoretical Positions – The Political Stream

3.3.1 Third Way Ideology

The election of the New Labour government in 1997 is a clear example of an important shift in the political stream described by Kingdon (1995), which had a significant impact on the problem stream. The new government marked a distinct and decisive move away from the ideologies, practices and policies of the previous 18 years of Conservative government and had an extremely strong mandate (Annesley et.al 2010, Morgan 2001). The large majority that they gained in the 1997 general election suggested that the public mood was one of optimism and issues of fairness and social justice were high on the new agenda. This allowed a new focus on and interpretation of old problems, some of which had previously been seen as too large or entrenched to be dealt with. One of the most significant was the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty. The New Labour government was committed to the Third Way approach and although there are many discussions about the precise nature of the Third Way and how it was adapted over time, it is important to overview the broad parameters of the ideological position as it was interpreted by the New Labour governments as it proved to be highly significant in shaping the problem stream.

Giddens (1998 p.26) described the Third Way as “...a framework of thinking and policy-making that seeks to adapt social democracy to a world which has changed fundamentally over the past two or three decades.” Although the term ‘Third Way’ has been used in many ways since the beginning of the 20th Century, the UK version, was an attempt to bridge the gap between the ideologies of the ‘Old

Labour' governments of the 1960s and 1970s and the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s; "...to transcend both old-style social democracy and neo-liberalism" (Giddens 1998 p.26). Part of a wider European shift in left wing politics (Giddens 1998), the development of the Third Way attempted to enable the Labour party to embrace and build on those parts of the Thatcher revolution that were seen to have been successful and to address those elements that were wrong or had "gone too far" (Mandelson and Liddle 1996 p.14). Blair (1996) saw the Third Way approach as a way to re-build the sort of political consensus that Britain had seen in the post war period and move away from the dogmatism that had dominated politics in the recent past. Understanding this shift within the dominant neo-liberal policy paradigm suggests that far from creating a new paradigm as Giddens (1998) suggests, or being a simple shift of the Labour party to the right on the political spectrum, the Third Way and the New Labour brand was a concerted, and ultimately successful, attempt to reposition the labour party in the new dominant paradigm that had become firmly embedded since they last held power. This Third Way approach was set out clearly by Mandelson and Liddle (1996) the year before the Labour victory of 1997 and set the framework for the New Labour approach that was to follow:

- Whereas the left desired equality of outcome and the right individual freedom to do whatever they pleased, New Labour sets as its goal real equal opportunity for all and special privileges for none.

- Whereas the left appeared to argue for rights without responsibilities and the right that one was responsible for oneself alone, New Labour stresses the importance of mutual obligations.
- Whereas the left favoured more public consumption and investment and the right more private consumption and investment, New Labour gives immediate priority to investment – both public and private.
- Whereas some on the left wanted top-down centralised rules, administered by powerful bureaucracies, and the right wanted to privatise everything public and leave the rest to the market, New Labour advocates diversity and decentralisation, with bottom up solutions and public goals sometimes achieved by market means.
- Whereas the old left saw its job as to represent trade unions, pressure groups and the ‘working class’, and the right saw its role as to protect the rich together with powerful corporate interests, New Labour stands for the ordinary families who work hard and play by the rules.

(Mandelson and Liddle 1996 p. 19-20)

This commitment to ‘modernisation’ is seen by Dorey (2005) as part of the process of fitting a party into an existing paradigm, a major challenge for the New Labour party. The commitments to providing opportunities, decentralising decision making, enforcing obligations and working with the market, shaped the direction of the social policy agenda from 1997 and can clearly be seen to fit in with the broad neo-liberal policy paradigm. There was still evidence of traditional Labour values

informing New Labour's position, in the form of a commitment to reducing inequality and the importance of the state in achieving this (Lister 2003). This combination of positions and approaches was seen in a number of New Labour / Third Way mantras (*what matters is what works* (Blair 1998), *joined up solutions to joined up problems*, *no rights without responsibilities*), but was initially embodied in the revised Labour party constitution of 1995. The controversial change to clause IV of the constitution constructed the 'New' Labour party as:

... a democratic socialist party. It believes that by the strength of our common endeavour, we achieve more than we achieve alone so as to create for each of us the means to realise our true potential and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many not the few, where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe, and where we live together, freely, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect (Labour Party 2013 p.3).

What this meant was that the range of new and old problems could now be considered. Within the broad concept of the Third Way ideology a number of overarching issues became important in the way that problems were thought through.

This breadth of new labour's Third Way ideology was important for electoral popularity as it allowed the Government to appeal to a wide range of people including many non-traditional Labour voters. The approach was not without

criticism however, both at the time of its development and in subsequent critiques of New Labour policy and progress much discussion has focused on the way that New Labour used the Third Way to appear to be fully committed to combating inequality on all fronts while in some areas they made little concrete progress (Annesley et al. 2010, McRobbie 2000, Gillies 2005b).

Gender equality was a key objective of the new labour party in opposition for two reasons; first they were concerned with capturing the valuable female vote at the upcoming election (Annesley and Gains 2007) but this was combined with the presence of a number of committed feminists within the party. The former minister interviewed for this thesis commented on the fact that “there were a whole lot of us feminists with a clear ...agenda.” Many of these feminist gained ministerial posts after the 1997 election and due to the use of women only shortlists the new labour government of 1997 had the highest proportion of female Members of Parliament ever seen in the UK (Annesley et al. 2010). It is interesting to note however that this feminist equality agenda was quickly translated into an agenda for women and women’s issues (McRobbie 2000) avoiding the confrontational label of feminism. The agenda for women particularly focused on getting women into paid employment through improving childcare and on improving children’s life chances through their mothers (Lister 2006). Although some advances were made, for example in maternity rights and pensions Annesley et al. (2010) show that in many other fundamental areas of gender inequality little or no progress was made.

This same shift from what might be seen as confrontational issues of inequality to a version of 'conflict-free politics' was also seen in areas of race equality, sexual preference equality and particularly social class disadvantage (McRobbie 2000, Gillies 2005b) with the Third Way focusing on social exclusion rather than inequality and equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome (Grover 2005).

Although New Labour argued for the recognition of structural factors in understanding of disadvantage, many of their approaches (including some elements of Sure Start Children's Centres) continued to reinforce ideas of individual agency as being most important (Gillies 2005b, Levitas 2005). The adoption of the concept and terminology of social exclusion initially, centred around the lack of opportunity and the state's role to provide opportunities for all citizens, however Gillies (2005a) suggests that this was counterbalanced with discussions of individuals failing to take the opportunities and support offered. Gillies (2005b) argues that central to the importance of the social exclusion debate was the removal of class from the discussion; a particular example of this is Giddens' discussion of the fact that the wealthy can also be socially excluded and the increasing insistence that social exclusion is not necessarily rooted in economic poverty but is linked to in-activity in the labour market. The introduction of terms of inclusion and exclusion alongside this removal of class from the debate created a culturally specific minority (at other times what might have been labelled as the underclass). The focus on this minority resulted or allowed the focus to shift away from inequality in the 'inclusive' part of society.

These issues of equality of opportunity and social exclusion were important in the development of the Children's Centre Programme. A range of concepts within the Third Way ideology influenced agenda setting and policy development but views of the interaction of structure and agency and a social investment approach were the two most significant and will form the basis of discussions in the next two sections.

3.3.2 Structure and Agency - Structuration

Discussions of structure and agency were central to the way that new and old policy problems were framed; what are the causes of social problems and where should resources be targeted for best effect? These discussions are central in understandings of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty, as was shown above, it is the interaction of structural and agential factors which form the basis of academic arguments. Are families poor and do they remain poor due to structural factors and conditions beyond their control or as a result of active choices and decisions?

Many of the discussions described in section 3.2 take a fairly clear stand on whether structure or agency is the main contributing factor however a more complex approach which sees the two elements interacting in different ways at different times is perhaps more useful in dealing with the complex, multi-faceted, entrenched problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty. Although more difficult to theorise and formulate policy for, the idea that different people will act and react in different ways in the same situations or that the structural constraints placed on individuals will be addressed or adapted to differently, provides a more realistic vision of the situation. Both Bourdieu and Giddens

developed theories, in the 1970s, which attempted to reframe traditional debates and incorporate ideas of both structure and agency within one theoretical approach. Both theoretical positions can be classified as a taking a 'structuration' approach (Parker 2000).

Bourdieu's theory is predominantly concerned with the way that structure and agency work to maintain class imbalance and domination. Bourdieu highlights three key elements in his theory Field, Capital and Practice; these three areas interact in different ways and at different levels to produce every day interactions (Jenkins 2002). At its simplest, Bourdieu highlights how individual action (practice) is adapted to the situation (field) in which it is used but shows how practice is constrained by issues of: economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1986). It is the difference in capital (in different combinations) that produces the power imbalances in interactions and maintains the dominant social structure.

Bourdieu's work on reproduction and habitus is also relevant here; transcending the limitations of objective (structural) or permissive (rational) explanations of inequality, Bourdieu use the concept of habitus to suggest a middle ground.

Bourdieu describes habitus as " ...an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted" (1977 p.95). Habitus is not one thing, it is more useful to think of it as a disposition, a way of looking at and negotiating with the world. Reay (2004) suggests that one of the crucial features of habitus is that it is embodied, that is, it is not simply about mental attitudes it is present in all things, physical, intellectual and emotional.

Habitus on a personal level determines how a person will stand, speak, and act in a

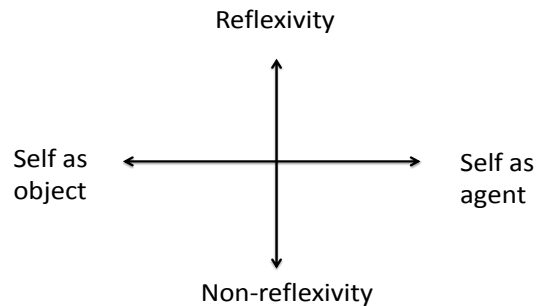
particular situation; how they will respond on all levels to the situation they find themselves in. However, they would be unlikely to be able to explain the rationale for their response. This habitus induced response will also heavily influence the way others respond to and view individuals (Jenkins 2002). Sharp (1980) suggests that the nature of Bourdieu's (1986) theory of habitus is in line with cultural explanations of poverty and fails to account for meaningful agency. Dismissing these charges of determinism Bourdieu highlights that habitus is flexible and has the potential to generate a wide range of possible responses depending on the individual and the situation but does acknowledge that habitus is durable and imprinted through socialisation in the home and suggests that it is children's habitus that influences the outcomes of their education. In line with Bernstein (1971) and Willis (1977) the suggestion is that the Education system is based on middle class culture (or habitus) which puts working class children at a significant disadvantage. Individual and shared habitus are likely to produce a response that will further disadvantage children and may lead to educational failure (Jenkins 2002), a factor identified by successive governments as being highly significant in the continuation of Cycles of Disadvantage.

Giddens' writings are more optimistic about the potential for change. Although he also writes on the way that structure and agency factors interact he attempts to recast individuals as active agents who "construct their own lives, but not always under conditions of their own choosing" (Cheal 2005 p.162). In this case, structure and agency co-exist with neither being more or less important and each having the ability to impact on the other. In this case, structural circumstances can shape

individuals' behaviour but individuals are also capable of changing social and structural circumstances. Central to Giddens' theory of structuration is the concept of reflexivity, a process by which individuals monitor and revise their behaviour based on a range of new and existing information that they have concerning the structural conditions that they act within (Parker 2000). This process of reflexive monitoring is both unconscious (similar to Bourdieu's habitus), and conscious, where active change in social practice can bring about change in wider structures (Hardcastle et.al 2005). Agency for Giddens is not about an intention to act but about individuals' capacity to act and this capacity is linked to 'knowledgeability', the level of information and knowledge that individuals have about the social and structural circumstances that influence them (Hardcastle et.al 2005).

It is this belief, of individuals' inherent capacity for reflexivity and agency, and the simplicity of challenges and barriers that has drawn many criticisms of Giddens' ideas (Clegg 1989, 1994, Archer, 1982 Vaughn 2001 in Hardcastle et.al 2005, McRobbie 2000). Hoggett's (2001) work on agency highlights many of the problems with Giddens' approach as he presents a model where reflexivity is shown as a continuum. At one end is Giddens ideal of a highly reflexive state where individuals are constantly monitoring and adapting their practice in the face of experience and information. At the other end is a position where reflexivity is absent or extremely minimal representing the position where individuals act purely from instinct or habitual behaviour. Combined with this, Hoggett (2001) adds a further dimension in the form of the level of impact that can be applied on the wider social and structural circumstances. At one end of this continuum is an agent as object who

has little or no ability to impact on their wider environment and at the other is an agent as subject who is fully able to impact and alter the wider structural factors.



(Fig. 3.2 A Model of Agency. Hoggett 2001 p.48)

According to Greener (2002) the model is not an attempt to categorise individuals but instead it shows the range of positions that may be in place in any given situation. An understanding of agency using this model helps in an understanding of individuals and groups who do not respond to policy initiatives that are offered. Situations where government had altered the structural circumstances but social action remained the same. The families who continued to engage in anti-social behaviour in areas of community regeneration, unemployed parents who did not take opportunities to re-train for work or, in the case of Sure Start, those parents who did not engage with the programme even when all of the external circumstances were ideal to allow them to do so.

Giddens was a key thinker in the New Labour project and an advisor to Tony Blair from 1997. His ideas of structuration can be seen to be highly influential in the agenda setting process and in some ways the contrast between his ideas on structuration and those of Bourdieu run along the same lines as the contrasts

between New and Old Labour. Rather than seeing those in poverty trapped in a class structure, New Labour took an optimistic approach to structuration with policy reflecting the belief in the power of knowledge and opportunities. The 1995 amended constitution committed the Labour Party to work towards:

a dynamic economy, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and co-operation to produce the wealth the nation needs and the opportunity for all to work and prosper, with a thriving public sector and high quality services, where those undertakings essential to the common good are either owned by the public or accountable to them;

a just society, which judges its strength by the condition of the weak as much as the strong, provides security against fear, and justice at work; which nurtures families, promotes equality of opportunity and delivers people from the tyranny of poverty, prejudice and the abuse of power (Labour Party 2013 p.3)

Kingdon (1995), when discussing the reasons that some problems make it onto the policy-making agenda while other do not, shows how where a problem is seen as too big or too difficult for government to tackle it is very unlikely that it will make it

onto the agenda. A government armed with an ideological position that believes changing structural factors can empower people to change their own position can be much more open to accepting problems onto the government agenda that would previously have been dismissed as having purely agential solutions and as such not being the job of government. The ideological drive of the New Labour government meant that the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty could be placed firmly on the agenda.

3.3.3 Social Investment Approach

Another key aspect of the New Labour government's approach, linked closely with the Third Way ideology, is a strong commitment to social investment. This has been a prominent theme in welfare policy since the establishment of the post-war Welfare State. A high priority was given to nation building by improving the health, education and living conditions of the population. During the period of New Right governments in the 1980s and 1990s the focus on building human capital collectively was replaced by a focus on individualism and the building of financial capital (Hudson and Lowe 2009). The election of the 'New Labour' government in 1997 saw the return of social investment as a corner stone of the welfare state (Lister 2003) and it was central to the New Labour governments of 1997, 2001 and 2005. A good deal of academic discussion has centred on the way that this approach can be seen in all areas of welfare including New Labour's attempts to deal with poverty and disadvantage (Dobrowolsky 2002, Lister 2004). The Third Way social investment state was identified as the way that the New Labour government would tackle the problems of social exclusion, seen as central to the

problems British society faced. As a symbol of the centrality of tackling social exclusion to the New Labour project, the Social Exclusion unit was set up with the remit of tackling a wide range of issues that had not previously been fully recognised or addressed marking a new approach to these and wider problems of poverty and disadvantage. The active social investment state is seen by Jenson and St Martin (2001) as a significant shift from the passive traditional post war welfare state. The attempt to facilitate citizen's integration into the market rather than to protect them from the market's damaging effects is a prominent theme in New Labour's efforts to modernise the welfare state (Mandelson and Liddle 1996, Blair 1996) and realign its ideology within the neo-liberal policy paradigm (Dorey 2005).

There is little argument over the importance of family, and especially, children in social investment approaches as they are the essential elements of the human capital at the heart of social investment approaches (Lister 2003). Giddens (1998) argues for placing children and their families at the heart of the social investment drive of the Third Way and the importance of the state's role in providing the conditions that families need to ensure that children achieve their potential. The discussions of children and family policy in a social investment state were characterised by the belief that government should shift the responsibility for the upbringing of children away from the neoliberal ideas of private responsibility back towards notion of collective responsibility (Dobrowolsky 2002). This shift had two important effects, first it opened the way for a more explicit and legitimate role for the state in family life and second it framed investment in children and families as being a benefit to all.

In the past Labour had been reluctant to encroach on the traditionally liberal area of the family. They had seen the problems of the family as being based purely in issues of poverty, and had distanced themselves from the moral conservatism of Right wing governments (Giddens 2000). Initially Giddens was clear that the sort of intervention in families advocated by the Third Way approach was not based on a conservative moral agenda, stating that:

We should accept that people can live happily without being married, homosexuals can raise children just as competently as the heterosexual population, and, given adequate resources single parents are able to bring up children just as satisfactorily as couples can (1998, p90-91).

Although rejecting the conservative moral agenda, following the ideas of structuration it was recognised that poverty and deprivation had huge impacts on families. At the same time however, there was also an acknowledgment that the problems of family breakdown and limited responsibility also impacted on social investment ideals (Giddens 2000). These ideas clearly drew on those linked to Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty outlined above and had developed and shifted during the first few years in office; acknowledging the structural issues that impacted on families but also alluding to cultural and rational explanations based more in ideas of the underclass. Framing the whole approach as one of social investment within the broad Third Way approach meant that New Labour

could be flexible enough to combine what would previously have been conflicting approaches (Welshman 2006).

Placing Children and Family policy within the social investment approach also allowed expansions in welfare that could be justified as being beneficial to all. The social investment approach would not only address issues of inequality and social injustice, but also improve economic prosperity by investing in human capital (Esping-Andersen 2002). Combining these goals under one heading allowed the government to be clear that the pursuit of social justice was not simply a left-wing ideological goal. The economic benefits of promoting social justice and of investing in human capital were drawn on as further justification of the approach (Lister 2004, Borrie 1994). Taking this approach meant that placing the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty on the government agenda and using intervention in families as a way to address the problem could be supported by those interested in economic growth as well as social justice, ensuring a wide base of support.

The ideas of social investment and early intervention were not exclusive to the New Labour Governments. Academic discussions in the 1990s began to focus on the ideas of social investment in the face of changing labour markets and growing inequality. As discussions developed, family became central to these ideas in terms of providing a way to improve both adult and child outcomes (Esping-Andersen 2002, Mahon 2012). Debates around these issues were taking place across the OECD and there was a growing consensus that addressing poverty and social disadvantage could be achieved by taking these approaches. The majority of

European countries faced similar economic and social challenges, and existing welfare systems were ill equipped to deal with these new risks (Esping-Andersen 2002). Unsurprisingly then, there was some convergence in the way individual states chose to deal with these challenges (Gauthier 2002). The focus on early childhood and education by the OECD was also significant in individual countries. The ministerial advisor interviewed for this thesis had previously been involved in the OECD starting strong review for England and highlighted the significance of these reports and wider developments in the Early Years field on the Government at the time.

“They had a lot of encouragement from OECD, the rest of Europe were flocking to see what we were doing although other countries were investing it was just day care stuff no one else was doing a full integrated model with day care and health and family support and employment advice” (Ministerial Advisor).

Across Europe Governments were pursuing a range of similar ‘family’ policies aiming to get parents into work and improve child outcomes (Lister 2003, Churchill 2011a) however, in line with Kingdon’s (1995) model the specific context in each country shaped the specific nature of these developments.

3.4 Impact of the Political Stream on the Problem Stream

3.4.1 New Labour's Focus on Cycles of Disadvantage – Process Factors

In the UK party political system, the ideology of a political party is only really significant for the policy-making process if that party can get elected to government. In 1997 New Labour not only won the General election but won it with a large majority gaining 418 seats in parliament against the Conservatives 165 seats. The key message of the New Labour campaign had been one of change and the large majority won on this mandate had many implications for policy development. It was, without a doubt, the event in the political stream that led to the opening of windows of opportunity in a number of policy areas (Annesley et al. 2010). The strong election victory meant the ideological drivers of the New Labour party became the drivers of the New Labour government and began to shape the nature of both problem and policy streams. This will be the focus of the first part of this section.

Kingdon (1995) argues that where problems are seen as indicative of wider system problems they are likely to be taken more seriously by policy makers. For New Labour Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty were seen as the result of a lack of investment in human capital, symptoms of a system that put the market before society (Borrie 1996). At the same time, Kingdon (1995) suggests that if a problem is seen as 'too hard to solve' it may be avoided for fear of failure. Here it is important to recognise the difficulty of addressing problems that will take generations to change within the electoral cycles time frame within which politicians work. It is much more likely that smaller more manageable problems

will be identified. However, New Labour (and Tony Blair personally), whilst in opposition, had been active in highlighting the issue of persistent poverty and as a government were eager to engage with the problem. As highlighted above, ideologically they were committed to addressing wide ranging entrenched problems within the frame of social investment.

The ideas of the Third Way, structuration and social investment are all important in understanding how the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty became firmly embedded on the government agenda but they are also important in understanding the way that the problem was framed which ensured that it remained on the agenda. The ideological position of the government was the main driver in the choice to tackle long term and entrenched problems and in the decisions to tackle them using both structural and agential approaches. The decision to tackle Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty were not driven by an immediate crisis as such, these problems were entrenched and although, as Kingdon (1995) suggests, new research evidence was significant in the focus on them, this was part of a wider ideological context and political drive. New Labour actively went in search of the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty, with a confidence that they had a new approach in the Third Way that would allow them to succeed in dealing with these issues in a way that previous governments had not been able. Where change is driven by the political stream Kingdon suggests that “[t]he problems may not have changed at all; nor...the solutions” (1995 p.174).

In an attempt to 're-engage' with academics and research, two conferences entitled 'New Cycles of Disadvantage' (1997) and 'Persistent Poverty and Lifetime Inequality' (1998) were organised by The Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE), funded by the ESRC on behalf of the Treasury. The aim of the conferences were to revisit previous research on Cycles of Disadvantage and receive new research based on results from the 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS) in an attempt to fully understand the nature of the problem (CASE 1999). Welshman (2007) suggests that much of the evidence was simply re-presented and much of the lack of clarity which existed in the original research programme into Cycles of Disadvantage was also evident in these conferences. There were, for example, still no answers as to why some but not all poor children underachieved at school or how some families managed to overcome the material and environmental disadvantage and produce children who became educationally or economically successful. It was confirmed that childhood disadvantage was linked to lower adult earnings but the new data showed that this was regardless of educational qualifications and contrary to the widely held notion of education as a simple and direct route out of poverty. Analysis of the longitudinal data seemed to suggest that educational establishments were limited in their ability to effect adult earnings, more important than the school was the input of parents in the education process (Feinstein 1998).

By the time these conferences took place, the term social exclusion was rapidly replacing poverty in policy circles across the OECD (Esping-Andersen 2002) and explicit talk of the underclass in the UK had slid away with the previous

Conservative governments (Byrne 2005). Nonetheless, the titles of the conferences suggest that the idea of a Cycle of Disadvantage was one that the New Labour government were willing to engage with. Many of the people involved in the CASE conferences were those that had been involved in the original Cycles of Disadvantage research programme. This was less a new approach and more a recap for new politicians. The papers from the conference show, however, that it was well received by the academics and civil servants involved who saw an important difference in the fact that information was now being presented to a government that was prepared to act on the issues raised. In Kingdon's terminology, the problem of persistent poverty had not changed but the changes in the political stream encouraged the problem to resurface and allowed a 'new' range of policies to be (re)considered. It was also clear from the summary of the conference, provided by the Treasury, that family was seen to be at the heart of the problem of persistent poverty. (Lee and Hills 1998)

Alongside the revisiting of the Cycle of Disadvantage research was the re-engagement by the academic left with a discourse that located individual actions alongside the structural factors that constrained them; an attempt to reclaim agency debates (e.g., Giddens 1998, Williams and Pillinger 1996, Le Grand 1997, Williams and Popay 1999, Gregg and Machin 2001 Hoggett 2001, Such and Walker 2005). The shift in the political stream meant that these ways of defining and addressing problems could be aired. Deacon (2003) suggests that the New Labour government, only too happy to disassociate itself from the 'old left' ways of thinking and introduce a more pragmatic, "what counts is what works" attitude,

could easily take on both structural and individualistic discourses. The government was now willing to step in and address structural issues but at the same time individuals must be prepared to act to improve their own situations. Predominantly taking an adaptive approach to the understanding of Cycles of Disadvantage, in line with Giddens' structuration theory, it was acknowledged that individual behaviour must be understood as a response to structural factors and environmental circumstances.

It is too simplistic, however, to say that the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty was accepted onto the policy-making agenda in 1997 and remained unchanged and unchallenged. The nature of such a long standing, entrenched and complex problem is that there is no definitive cause and solution relationship. Many of the debates touched on in this section have been in circulation for decades and have experienced highs and lows in their influence on academic thought and government policy. None, however, have been exclusively persuasive in their argument. Instead, academics, politicians and policy makers have drawn on these concepts to formulate understandings of the problem faced. Kingdon (1995) talks about these shifts in the problem stream and how feedback from policy and external changes, especially in the political stream, can continue to impact on the problem stream even after a problem is on the government agenda.

For New Labour these shifts were not overly problematic, the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty was broad enough to accommodate shifts without it moving off the agenda and the nature of the Third Way ideology meant that they were not committed to one approach. As highlighted above, initially,

discussions centred on the lack of opportunity and the state's role to provide opportunities for all citizens. When it became apparent that, counter to Giddens' structuration theory, some individuals did not engage in reflexive practice and failed to respond positively to structural changes, Gillies (2005a) suggests that these initial ideas were counterbalanced with discussions of individuals failing to take the opportunities and support offered. Deacon (2003) highlights that New Labour, although initially advocating an adaptive approach to the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty, was willing to engage with rational, cultural and permissive approaches to deal with the causes of the problem in its attempt to provide complex solutions to complex problems. For some this shift was seen in a move from a social investment state to a more interventionist surveillance state for poor families (Parton 2008). The ideas around the cause of the problem may have shifted but the ideological position of the government allowed them to continue to address the problem using a wider variety of approaches.

3.4.2 The impact of Individuals – Participant Factors

Clearly then, at the agenda setting stage process factors are very significant. Issues such as ideology, political change and research findings are all key drivers in ensuring that certain issues make it onto the government agenda. In line with Kingdon's (1995) analysis visible participants are also significant here. He identifies that a range of individuals are involved in the whole policy-making process but that some are far more visible than others. In his own research, he identifies figures like the President and prominent members of Congress as visible participants, whose comments and actions are important due to their visibility and influence. In the UK

system, ministers and the prime minister can be placed in this visible participant role. As shown above, the problems of persistent poverty had been raised before the 1997 election by the Borrie Commission (1994), Joseph Rowntree Foundation research and many other academic studies (Dean 2013), but much of the drive for the social investment state and the interpretation and adaptation of Giddens' (1998) Third Way approach can be linked to Tony Blair, both as leader of the opposition and as prime minister. Blair spoke and wrote at length on these topics, before and after becoming prime minister and the establishment of these ideological positions as central to what the New Labour government should do allowed the Cycles of Deprivation problem to become established on the agenda.

In 1996 when setting out his vision of 'New Britain' Blair talked of the injustice created by the Conservative governments, in the areas of income, taxes and opportunities and although poverty itself was discussed in limited amount pre-1997 (Dobrowolsky 2002), there was a clear commitment to tackling inequality and to bringing about social justice (Blair 1996). Although the ideas themselves were shared by the party as a whole it was Blair's public commitment to them (in his position as a highly influential visible participant) that was pivotal in shaping the problem stream.

One of the most significant personal impacts that Blair had within the political stream was his commitment to end child poverty in a generation:

Our historic aim will be for ours to be the first generation to end child poverty. It will take a generation. It is a 20-year mission, but I believe it can

be done... Poverty should not be a birthright. Being poor should not be a life sentence. We need to break the cycle of disadvantage (Blair 1999).

Although this pledge was much more specific than the wider commitment to address Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty, it was key in framing the wider problem. Kingdon (1995) emphasises the fact that problems do not simply exist as facts. There is always an element of interpretation and framing and it is this that will often determine whether the problem gets onto the policy-making agenda. The pledge to eradicate child poverty had two important effects. First, it framed the problem in a way that allowed it to be popular and accepted. Rather than the problem being framed in the welfare dependency discourse, it shifted the problem to a social investment and fairness discourse. Old discussions of the deserving and undeserving poor are also important here. There was some resistance both in government and the general public to the state putting more support in for people who had, for many years, been portrayed as scroungers and layabouts (Golding 1999). There was no such argument to be made about children. Investing in children, the deserving poor, through their families allowed the government to identify the problem as a universal one, a problem that would have long term impacts on society (Lister 2006). Secondly, the commitment to eradicate child poverty also supported the internal shift or modernisation of the Labour party as it moved the ideological position away from the working class poor to the classless, blameless group of 'children' (Dobrowolsky 2002). The announcement of the child poverty target was a somewhat last minute decision, added to a speech by the

Prime Minister. In the long run, it proved impossible to meet but the initial commitment, made by such a visible individual, was important in its capacity to strengthen the position of the problem on the policy agenda.

3.5 A Window of Opportunity – Securing the Position of Cycles of Disadvantage on the Government Agenda

Kingdon describes a window of opportunity as the time when the problem, policy and political streams come together. Driven by the problem or political stream, these opportunities can be both predictable and unexpected. In his own research Kingdon's respondents were often not able to say (even with hindsight) what had led to particular policy changes other than to say that 'the time was right', but Kingdon (1995) suggests that a change in administration is one of the most important events in the political stream that can lead to the opening of a window of opportunity. In the UK system, as highlighted in the previous chapter, this sort of change can be even more significant especially if the winning party has a strong majority. The election victory of New Labour in 1997 marked more than a change in government. The overwhelming majority, with the party winning almost double the number of seats of the other main parties combined, meant that the new government would be able to enact almost any policy that they chose. The fact that the party had been elected on a mandate of change, social justice and fairness, appeared to show that the British electorate were ready for a significantly different approach. The change in government opened a number of windows of opportunity

in a range of policy areas, some resulting in policy change but others resulting in wider ranging changes in approach and principles (Annesley et.al 2010).

In the case of the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty, the window of opportunity, opened by the change in government, allowed for a number of things to happen. These were important in the process of establishing the problem onto the government agenda and in the subsequent development of the Children's Centre Programme. The most important were the CASE conferences mentioned earlier, as these provided the justification for focusing on families to address the problem. As highlighted in the previous section the ideas presented at the CASE conferences were not exclusive to the New Labour Government, they were in line with wider ideological and policy developments across many European countries around the same time (Gauthier 2002, Lister 2003, Churchill 2011a). The acceptance and commitment to these ideas by the New Labour Government meant that the ideas of social investment and early intervention were enacted with more speed and force than in some other countries. As will be shown in the following chapter, early years was to become central to the government's attempts to address Cycles of Disadvantage and later child poverty.

Initially, following the election victory, two specific manifesto commitments were fulfilled, free nursery places for four year olds and the trial of Early Excellence Centres (although interestingly at this time neither of these developments were explicitly linked to the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage). At a more fundamental level the window of opportunity provided by the election of the new government allowed the principle of using social investment approaches to address the issues of

Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty to be established. This 'establishing a principle' discussed in the previous chapter occurs as a result of the coupling of the three streams but has a longer term impact than only allowing a policy to be enacted. Once a principle is established it reframes the problem and policy stream and so shapes the nature of future agenda setting and policy enactment in a more permanent way (Kingdon 1995).

The window of opportunity opened by the election of the New Labour government allowed the issue of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty to move from a condition to a problem and more importantly to "a problem appropriate for governmental action" (Kingdon 1995 p.111). The Children's Centre Programme was not fully enacted for another eight years, although a number of policies were put in place in the intervening period; Early Excellence Centres, Neighbourhood Nurseries, Sure Start Local Programmes. What is more important is the principle that was established, the principle of early intervention as the job of government. As highlighted at the beginning of this chapter this was not the first time that policy had been based around this idea, but the conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s had severely eroded the principle. The success of the window of opportunity at this point was in the establishment of what the minister interviewed for this thesis called the "...new frontier of the welfare state; the under 5s". As long as policy could be seen to be addressing the Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty, policy could continue to evolve.

3.6 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been to address the first research objective: *to identify the range of factors that drove New Labour's understanding of, and responses to, the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty in families with children*, the problem that underpinned the development of the Children's Centre Programme. This has been done within Kingdon's (1995) agenda setting framework that explores how an issue becomes a problem to be dealt with by government and becomes established on the government's policy-making agenda.

First, the chapter showed how the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty was not new. It was a problem that had fallen in and out of favour since the establishment of the welfare state, but even when it was not prominent on the government agenda, discussion in the problem stream had developed a full range of ways to frame the problem. Central to these discussions were debates around structure and agency with a range of theories emphasising one or the other as more important. It was shown how important these debates were in framing the issue of Cycles of Disadvantage. This framing is a central part of what happens in the problem stream (Kingdon 1995) driving the change of an issue into a problem that should / could be dealt with by government.

Second, a range of influential factors in the political stream were highlighted: third way ideology, theories of structuration and ideas of social investment were important as they shaped the way that the New Labour government viewed the causes and solutions to social problems. The New Labour government of 1997 was committed to dealing with issues of inequality (including the Cycle of Disadvantage)

using a combination of structural and agential approaches. Following the work of Giddens (1998) it was suggested that changes in the wider structural factors that impact on individuals would, in turn, result in changes in individual action.

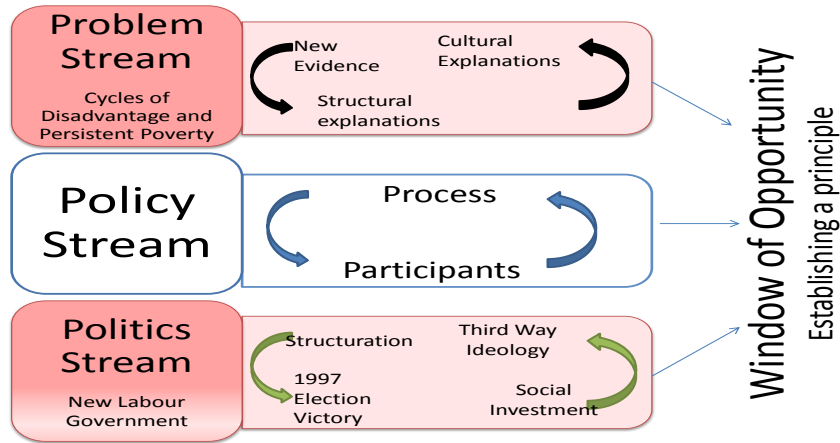
Third, the chapter showed how the political stream, both process and participant elements (ideological and individual actors) framed the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty and ensured that the problem was seen as one that required government intervention; the decision to take on this longstanding issue was ideological.

Finally, the chapter showed how the strength of the election victory in 1997 provided the shift in the political stream that opened a window of opportunity. This was not simply a window that would allow development of a single policy. This window established a principle, the principle that the issue of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty was a problem that could be dealt with by government. This principle provided the foundation for the development of a range of innovative and expensive early years projects which in time led to the establishment of the Children's Centre Programme.

In the case of this problem the key elements that were influential were, as Kingdon suggests, the problem stream, the political stream and visible participants.

However, a finer grain analysis highlights that, the most important aspects were the process elements of the political stream: the overwhelming majority gained in the 1997 election and the ideological framework set by the third way. These elements

in particular allowed a window of opportunity to open which established a principle which in turn shaped the problem and policy streams.



(Fig. 3.3 Prominent Elements in Establishing Cycles of Disadvantage on the Government Agenda)

It was the principle of using a social investment approach to address the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage that eventually led to the development of the Children's Centre Programme. This development was not straightforward or linear and may not, at first sight, appear to be a direct result of the window of opportunity established in 1997. This development will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Alternative Selection – the Development of the Children’s Centre Programme at

National Level

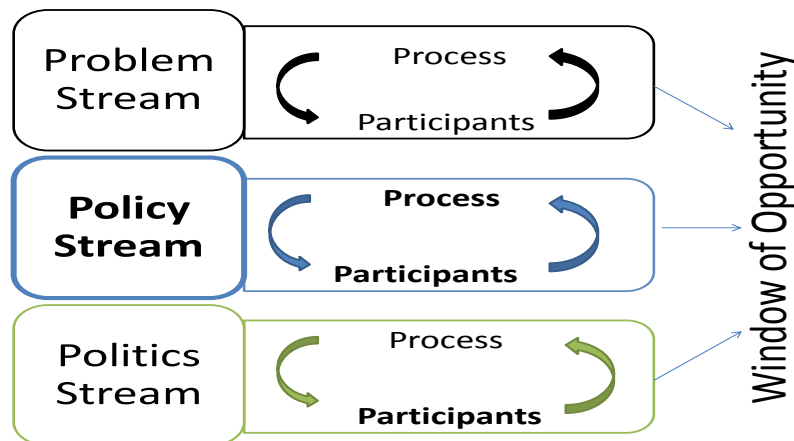
4.1 Introduction

The process of policy selection is described by Kingdon as alternative selection. The process whereby, once a problem has arrived on the policy-making agenda, all possible policy options are narrowed to those that actually receive serious attention and eventually result in policy implementation. In his conclusions from research, Kingdon highlights that the most important inter-related elements in this part of the process are the policy stream and, what he terms, hidden participants: civil servants, junior ministers and specialists in the policy field.

It is within the policy stream that policies are selected from, or discarded back into, the “primeval policy soup” (Kingdon 1995 p.117), the place where policy ideas float around ready to be coupled with problems when the time is right. As highlighted in chapter two, in his counter to charges of randomness and fortuity Kingdon shows that although policies float in the soup, there are clear criteria that they must meet in order to be chosen, coupled and put in place. Policies must be viable, both in practical and value terms, they must be affordable and any future constraints must be limited.

Key in this process of policy selection are what Kingdon (1995) terms policy entrepreneurs who are influential in pushing their favoured policies forward for selection and for ensuring that policies are ready to be coupled with problems

when the opportunity arises. Criteria are not independent entities and therefore must be interpreted and applied by individuals. At this alternative selection phase the most important policy entrepreneurs are hidden individuals; junior ministers, civil servants, individuals in the policy community.



(Fig. 4.1 Prominent Elements in the Alternative Selection Phase)

In the case of the Children's Centres Programme, these elements are indeed important. In addition, it will be shown that, the political stream again proves to be pivotal with aspects of ideology and public opinion leading the process of alternative selection and subsequent changes in the policy stream. This chapter will use a combination of academic literature, documentary evidence and interview data to provide a rich picture of the development of the Children's Centre Programme in England. In doing so it will meet research objectives one and two: *to identify the range of factors that drove New Labour's understanding of, and policy responses to, the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage in families with children, and to analyse the development of the Children's Centre Programme using existing theories of policy-making and implementation.*

First, the chapter will focus on the developments in the policy stream and give an overview of changes that took place in the early years field after the 1997 election. Policy responses to the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty came from two directions, early intervention and work activation, each with its own ideas of how policy could address the problem identified. Second, the chapter will show how innovative pilot programmes were brought together to form the basis of the Children's Centre Programme. Although this was the result of continuing developments in the policy stream it will be shown how a range of wider (policy and political) factors ensured that this development was framed as a continuation of the Sure Start programme. Third, the chapter will highlight how the political stream proved pivotal in shaping the policy stream. Elements of ideology impacted on the decisions around: which policy approach could be taken, which policies met the criteria for survival and the process of policy-making. Other political elements connected to the national mood also shaped the actions of the government in their policy decisions. Finally, the chapter will show that in line with Kingdon's analysis individuals played a central role in this 'alternative selection' phase however alongside hidden participants the influence of higher profile political figures were also important in the way the policy developed.

The previous chapter highlighted the significance of the New Labour victory in 1997 in the opening of a window of opportunity. This window established the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty on the government agenda. This was done by establishing a principle, that this was an issue to be dealt with by government. This window changed the parameters of the policy stream allowing a

new range of policy ideas to be considered many of which had been developed whilst in opposition in line with wider discussions across many other nation states (Gauthier 2002). New Labour had a range of policies and initiatives in place for when they took office, many of them aimed at addressing long term entrenched issues. However, as highlighted by Exworthy (2008), the nature of complex, multi-faceted problems complicate the policy-making process. Even though the problem of persistent poverty was accepted as a problem to be dealt with, there were still difficulties in making clear links between cause and effect. The CASE conferences (1998, 1999) presented evidence of the impact of the problem and began to develop solutions however, the causal link was not simple or clear. At other times this lack of clarity between cause and effect may have led to the issue not making it on to the agenda. In this case, it will be shown that the strength of the election victory allowed for a range of policies to be legitimately attached to the problem.

Discussions in the interviews undertaken for this thesis and former ministers' recollections (Eisenstadt 2011) support Kingdon's assertion that policy is often formulated within the policy stream separate from the specific problem it will finally become attached to. A former minister involved both pre and post election in the development of policy talked about how the early years focus of ministers, before the election, was driven by a feminist agenda to improve childcare for children and opportunities for women, while Sure Start was conceived as a nurture programme to help improve the relationship between parents and their babies. Underlying these separate agendas was a drive to improve issues of inequality,

disadvantage and unfairness and in the broader sense these policies were implicitly formulated to address issues of cyclical and persistent poverty.

4.2 The Policy Stream

4.2.1 The Background to the Development of Children's Centres

By the time the first New Labour government was elected in 1997 they had clear ideas about their main priorities in terms of long term policy. The process of policy development and selection had, as Kingdon suggests, been in process long before the window of opportunity was opened. Some of the policies put in place early in the first term had also been designed and developed whilst in opposition. These early developments in the policy stream were important in an understanding of which policies surfaced after the election and the way that policy developed. A former minister recalled:

I was involved before the election in developing our approach to the under 5's and I think the key to what we were trying to do was to stop the silos of services for children and build services around the needs of children ...That was the genesis of it in discussions before the election in the development of what I call the new frontier of the welfare state, the under 5s.

The commitments in the 1997 manifesto to free nursery places for four year olds and the piloting of Early Excellence centres to combine high quality care and education were the first signs that as a government New Labour intended to

include early years in their commitment to improving education for children and it was subsequently seen in policy that this was part of a wider commitment to children and families. The significance of the transformation in early years was emphasised by all interviewed but summed up by a former ministerial advisor, “...across government you have a view that they are going to invest seriously as part of the manifesto, as part of what they were elected on, in support for children and families”.

Over the next thirteen years New Labour transformed the fragmented, little acknowledged, early years sector into a mainstream area of policy and managed to combine Children and Family policy, Early Education policy and Childcare policy in a range of interconnected initiatives (for a full overview of these changes see: Smith 2007b, Fawcett et.al 2004, Eisenstadt 2011). These developments re-enforced the OECD opinion on the:

...complexity of policy-making in the early childhood field... policy is concerned not only with providing education and care to young children but it is also linked with issues of women’s employment and equality of opportunity; child development and child poverty issues; labour market supply; health, social welfare and later education. (OECD 2006 p13)

Although this complexity might appear problematic if policy-making is viewed as linear, using Kingdon’s (1995) model, the multi-faceted nature of the policies meant

that there were opportunities to couple the policies with a range of problems, making the policy more sustainable.

At the same time the broad nature of the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty meant that a range of policies could be attached to the problem, what Kingdon (1995) refers to as spill over. Being a relatively new focus for government there was no established framework in place that dictated the way to proceed as described by a former ministerial advisor:

... [the government] were also open to experiment, the economy was strong again and they had money and they were going to have a go and see what worked and they innovated...at the same time as we were lobbying for an integrated Early Excellence Centre model you also got Gordon Brown at the Treasury being influenced in the childcare, getting women back to work agenda and you had Norman Glass and that group developing a Sure Start model.

In a different political context these conflicting agendas may have needed to be sorted out in the policy stream (using the criteria identified by Kingdon 1995) before one would be chosen for enactment however, the strength of the political stream meant that a range of agendas were developed alongside each other. It is important to note that, irrespective of the competing agendas, the new emphasis on young children was perceived as being central to the new government's approach and that there were a number of elements in the political stream that

provided support for this emphasis. Talking about the focus on addressing Cycles of Disadvantage a former minister described how this focus fitted with the New Labour approach:

Labour was about equalising opportunities so investing in poor people from the start obviously made sense... that was what Labour was about and that was a central part to our thinking. We had actually connected with women and for women...those services for children in their early years were very attractive so it was popular as well. So it was popular, it fitted the ideology and it was absolutely at the heart of what a Labour government should be about (Former Minister).

The Children's Centre Programme did not come directly out of the window of opportunity created by the 1997 election victory. Instead, a range of 'pilot' projects developed that, within ten years, came together to form the Children's Centre Programme. A combination of rapid and fundamental change alongside more incremental change led to the Children's Centre Programme with a combination of process and participants leading the change. As highlighted above the breadth of the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty meant that a number of policies could be linked with it but the two most significant themes for the Children's Centre development were policies aiming to address the problem using early intervention and those that would use work activation of parents. These two

policy themes will be explored first before showing how the Children's Centre Programme brought the two themes together.

4.2.2 Addressing Cycles of Disadvantage through Early Intervention and Sure Start Local Programmes

The focus on early intervention as a particular type of social investment and as a solution to the problems of disadvantage was not exclusive to New Labour but was highly important in their approach (Lister 2003). Much earlier attempts to use early intervention were advocated in the 1970s as a solution to the problems of persistent poverty. Politicians at the time, but most significantly Sir Keith Joseph (Secretary of State for Social Services), were influenced by American research which appeared to show a clear link between early intervention and positive outcomes later in life (Welshman 2007). This same research was also influential in the commitment that New Labour developed to early intervention policies. The updated case for early intervention was put forward by Professor Jane Waldfogel at the Persistent Poverty and Lifetime Inequality workshop held by CASE in 1998. This presentation (published the following year) gave a positive overview of the American early intervention programmes. Taken in conjunction with Feinstein et.al's (1999) research findings, that showed intervention through the compulsory school system was ineffective in breaking the link between parents' occupational status and their children's occupational and economic status, the case for early intervention was strong and formed the basis of the Sure Start initiative (Glass 1999).

The Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP) announced in the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review can be seen to be the centrepiece of New Labour's social investment approach; multi- agency, cross departmental, community designed and led with long-term and substantial funding. The development of the Local Programmes is covered extensively in the literature (Glass 1999 and 2006, Belsky et.al 2007, Driver and Martell 2002, Hamm 2010, Lewis 2011) as this development marked the beginnings of what was to be a significant shift in children and family policy.

Initially conceived before the 1997 election, the idea of a programme of early intervention was described by Tessa Jowell MP, a key individual in the formulation of the Sure Start idea, as "a nurture programme that focused on reinforcing the intimacy of the early relationships between mothers and their tiny babies" (Gerhardt et.al 2011 p. 145) but she conceded that the programme that emerged after the election was far more wide ranging and aimed to address a range of "competing agendas in government" (Gerhardt et.al 2011 p.147).

Sure Start Local Programmes were set the task of providing an effective early intervention programme that would address the issues of social exclusion and transmitted disadvantage that were high on the government's agenda. Early documentation identified the aim of Sure Start Local Programmes as:

...to work with parents-to-be, parents and children to
promote the physical, intellectual and social
development of babies and young children –
particularly those who are disadvantaged – so that

they can flourish at home and when they get to school, and thereby break the cycle of disadvantage for the current generation of young children (DfES 2002a p.3).

In 1998 when applications for the first 60 trailblazer local programmes were invited, the aim was to have 250 Sure Start Local Programmes running in the most deprived areas of the country by 2002. This was an ambitious target in itself due to the relatively unpreparedness of the early years sector for such major innovation (Annings and Ball 2008). A year later this target was doubled to 500 by 2004, with the associated funding rising to £500 million (Belsky et.al 2007).

The local programmes enjoyed a high level of autonomy, partly due to the fact that funding was received from central government rather than through the local authority. There was however, an expectation that all programmes would provide a core offer of: “out-reach and home visiting; support to families and parents; good quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children; primary and community health and advice; support for people with special needs” (Ball 2008 p. 23). The way in which this core offer was to be provided was flexible and personal to each programme (Lewis 2011).

As with other area based initiatives, designed to be community led, Sure Start Local Programmes were to build on existing good practice within the community and have community (in this case parental) input at all stages. Parents needed to be involved on the Management Board of the local programmes and involved in consultations on, and evaluations of, services as well as being involved in the day to

day running of services in Local Programmes. It was hoped that this approach would ensure that local needs were at the heart of the Local Programmes and that there was a level of ownership of the projects by the local community (Gustafsson and Driver 2005, Williams and Churchill 2006, Glass 2006). This community engagement was a central part of the area based initiative approach that New Labour favoured and linked to the structuration ideas of Giddens, recognising the interconnecting relationship between people and their environments. In terms of the New Labour modernisation agenda, this approach also avoided the perceived paternalism of old Labour. The involvement of parents in the design, management and delivery of services could be seen to legitimise the programmes and avoid charges of interventionist government (Gustafsson and Driver 2005).

At the same time, however, targets for the Local Programmes were set centrally. Although these targets reflected the importance of work with both parents and children, they were unable to capture the essence of some of that work for example raising the self esteem of new parents. There are also suggestions that gradually these targets began to show a darker side to state intervention which focused on surveillance of working class mothers, as many targets were linked to parents but really mothers' behaviour (Clarke 2006). This marked the beginnings of a shift to what Parton refers to as a "surveillance state" (2008). This shift is not overtly surprising, as was highlighted in the previous chapter, the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty was itself subject to change and the New Labour government were flexible in their approach to understanding the problem and their choice of solutions. Although the structuration ideas of Giddens provided

the starting point for much policy in this area, the general ideological approach of the government also allowed space for more behaviourally based understandings of the problem. These shifts emphasise the importance of Kingdon's (1995) model as problem and policy streams remain fluid even after the window of opportunity has opened. In the case of Sure Start Local Programmes, in particular, the openness of the policy structure allowed for shifts and changes to occur without seeming to alter the fundamental policy (Eisenstadt 2011).

The importance of issues in the political stream can also be seen in the events surrounding the evaluation of the Sure Start Local Programmes. The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) was commissioned in 2001 to look at: the implementation of Sure Start, the effectiveness of services and the cost effectiveness of the local programmes as well as to provide a level of advice and support to local programmes in setting up their own local evaluations (Melhuish and Hall 2007). The discussions around the setting up of the evaluation were fraught and complicated by the wide variety of 'versions' of local programmes operating across the country without any clearly defined structure, intervention system or programme. This was to pose many methodological issues throughout the life of the evaluation (Meadows 2007, Eisenstadt 2011).

It was acknowledged that Sure Start would not produce immediate results. Yvette Cooper (Under-Secretary of State for Health) explained to parliament that:

Sure Start was set up to impact in the long term. It takes a long time for Sure Start to have an impact. Ultimately, we are concerned with making an impact

on children in 10, 20 or 30 years. We have a substantial research programme to monitor and evaluate Sure Start programmes, not just what they are doing during the next couple of years, but what they will do for the long term (House of Commons 2002b).

Nevertheless, the interim findings on child and family impact published by NESS in 2005 proved difficult for the government. They showed that the impacts of Sure Start Local Programmes were limited and inconsistent, with some of the 'hardest to reach' families still not being engaged in services. The difficulty of the findings for the government, who by this time had already announced a significant expansion of the programme and were close to a general election, meant that they did not release the findings for a number of months in order to formulate some explanations for the disappointing evidence (Eisenstadt 2011). In some sections of the media the findings represented a failure of the government's flagship programme (Phillips 2005, Marrin 2005). However other elements in the political stream worked positively for the government.

Parliamentary debates during the period of Sure Start Local Programme expansion show it to be a hugely popular policy with both MPs and their constituents, a very significant element of the political stream. Many MPs make the point of praising their local programmes during their speeches in parliament and pass on stories from constituents, many who say that Sure Start changed their lives. Those MPs who did not have Local Programmes ask many questions about when their

constituency would be offered the opportunity to be part of the programme and when the programme would be rolled out further (Hansard 2002). The importance of these comments were highlighted by the minister, ministerial advisor and senior civil servant interviewed for this thesis. The high profile of Sure Start in parliament lead Yvette Cooper (Under-Secretary of State for Health), to highlight that ... "It is unusual when the most hostile question that one gets from MPs is, "Can we have one in my area, please?" (House of Commons 2002b). Sure Start is not only raised in debates concerning child poverty, debates on (but not exclusive to) truancy, anti-social behaviour, breast feeding, health, employment policy, dental care, crime and mental health, all mention Sure Start as being important in policy solutions (Hansard 2002). The public and parliamentary support for Sure Start Local Programmes proved significant in the government's ability to push forward with the Sure Start policy, even in the face of disappointing evaluation results.

In his discussion of criteria for the survival of a policy, Kingdon (1995) suggests that both practical and value feasibility are highly significant factors. There needs to be a belief that the policy can actually deliver what it proposes as well as an acceptance of the principles or ideological base that the policy is built on. In this case there was a widespread belief that the policy could and indeed was working both among the general population, parliament and the early years field. Due to the strength of the change in the policy stream caused by the window of opportunity there was also a belief in the value of this type of community based early intervention. In combination, these elements of the political stream proved more persuasive than the early NESS evidence and although, as will be shown

below, the Children's Centre Programme was not a universalisation of the Sure Start Local Programmes, the strength of acceptance of this programme was drawn on to establish the same support for the Children's Centres that followed.

The disappointing impact results from the NESS (2005) also raised questions about the research base that had been used to develop the Sure Start Local Programmes. The community led, flexible approach highlighted by Glass (2006) as being so important in the nature of the Sure Start Local Programmes was very different from the standardised, formalised approaches of many of the US programmes that had formed the base of the research evidence that drove the early intervention approach (Penn et.al 2006, Eisenstadt 2011, Lewis 2011). The soundness of using the American research as the basis for the UK system was challenged by two studies in particular (Penn et al. 2006, Melhuish 2004). In an attempt to evaluate the often quoted claim that "...early childhood interventions in particular are effective and bring returns in the order of seven dollars saved for every one dollar spent" (Penn et al. 2006 p.1), the Early Childhood Research group at the Institute of Education conducted a wide ranging survey of relevant literature. They found 58 reports relating to the long term financial benefits of early intervention, however all 58 were based on only three actual studies. The three American Studies are well known: Abecedarian, Perry High Scope and Chicago Child Parent Centres (CPC). In a review looking wider than financial benefits Melhuish (2004) also re-visits the American studies and highlights concerns about the reliability and representativeness of these studies. The problems of using these studies as justification for early intervention programmes are twofold. First, there are

significant concerns about how robust the projects were in research terms. Both Melhuish (2004) and Penn et al. (2006) raise concerns about what were put forward as control trials but appear not to be. The second problematic area is in the specificity of these studies, again both Penn et al. (2006) and Melhuish (2004) draw attention to the fact that these small scale studies dealt with very specific groups of people in specific situation using specific methods. Very little of the evidence gained can be applied more widely than to the groups involved and the structures used. These points were highly significant in the development of the Sure Start Local Programmes as, although the American studies were drawn on to support the idea of early intervention, the Local Programmes were conceived by a government committed to a new way of delivering public services, with less top down direction and more community led action which resulted in programmes that were very different to the American framework.

4.2.3 Addressing Cycles of Disadvantage through Work Activation - Early

Excellence Centres and the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative

The government's fight against child poverty and cyclical disadvantage was also being undertaken outside the Sure Start agenda, with a drive to address poverty issues by looking at the barriers to work. It was a firm belief of the government that work was the best route out of poverty, but, in their Third Way understanding, New Labour recognised that there were barriers that prevented people entering the labour market over which they had little control. One of the most significant barriers identified in the run up to the 1997 election was the lack of affordable

childcare, this barrier was identified as being especially significant for women and so was also an important issue in New Labour's equality agenda.

The "National Childcare Strategy - Meeting the Childcare Challenge "(DfEE 1998) document discussed the way in which the government could address the barriers that many families faced when attempting to improve their situation by moving into work. This strategy had three aims:

1. Raising Quality
2. Making childcare more affordable
3. Improving accessibility (DfEE 1998)

The Early Excellence Centre (EEC) pilots promised in the 1997 manifesto formed part of the Childcare Strategy aim to raise quality and were championed by Margaret Hodge MP. Early Excellence Centres were launched as part of the government's strategy to raise educational standards, increase opportunities, support families, reduce social exclusion, increase the health of the nation and address child poverty (Bertram et.al 2004). According to the DfEE (1998) the overall aim was to improve the quality and quantity of childcare but also to improve the way that services worked together. The Early Excellence Centres had a flexible childcare element which appealed to working parents but also had the quality of early education, something that was often lacking in private day care provision. They began to break down the care / education divide (Eisenstadt 2011). Just as importantly, they were used to identify how integrated early childhood services could improve services across the sector, part of their aim was to provide

practitioner training and disseminate good practice across the early years sector (Bertram et. al. 2004).

In the interviews with those involved at a central level, Early Excellence Centres featured quite significantly as the original integrated early years programme proposed in the manifesto and as the first initiative to be put into place. There was an acknowledgment, however, that the Sure Start programme became the prominent early years programme due to a range of wider political factors including the size, money invested and popularity of the programme.

The 29 Early Excellence Centres pilots were evaluated over a three year period with positive results. The first key finding of the report was that

... deep, transformational change to integrate multi-agency services into a cohesive, comprehensive web of support for children and families, which has the potential to impact on cycles of deprivation over time, is an enormously challenging and ambitious agenda... but it is possible to achieve this within a timescale of approximately three - five years by building on existing provision, particularly school based provision (Bertram et.al 2004 p.8).

The evaluation estimated that mainstream revenue would need to be increased by 20-25% to establish Early Excellence Centres but the positive outcomes of the initiatives were wide ranging, not just in terms of the front line services provided

but also in terms of embedding integrated practice. It was highlighted that the high level of professionals involved in the Early Excellence Centres, especially at management level, provided the opportunity to disseminate integrated practice across the sector (Bertram et.al 2004). The Early Excellence Centres evaluation findings were also supported by the findings of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project, the first large scale, longitudinal study to focus on the effectiveness of early years education. Findings from the EPPE project showed that high quality early education had far reaching impacts, but also that poor quality provision did not just prevent children doing well but had an adverse affect on their development (Sylva et.al 2004). The case for high quality early education was strong.

The evaluation of the Early Excellence Centres was a much simpler task than the evaluation of the Local Programmes. There were far fewer Early Excellence Centres and their structure was far more standard. As such, any direct comparison between the results of the two evaluations may be misleading. Nonetheless, there was evidence of the Early Excellence Centres being a success in terms of establishing an integrated structure and in outcomes for children and families. They also had many of the elements of the New Labour government's ideological approach, area based (although not necessarily in areas of highest deprivation), multi-disciplinary approach and high levels of community engagement. However, they did not receive the same levels of public acknowledgement as the Sure Start Local Programmes, with little mention in parliament and little media coverage.

The Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative was announced in 2000 and began in 2001, also as part of the National Childcare Strategy and the government's aim to provide 45,000 new childcare places in the most deprived areas. The guidance highlighted that the nurseries should try to attract working parents from outside of the deprived area in order to improve sustainability. The Neighbourhood nursery places could be provided through new nurseries, extra places at existing nurseries or funding existing (underused) places and could be provided by the public, private or voluntary / not for profit sector. This approach to provision and delivery was also an early example of the way New Labour would use a pragmatic partnership approach to providing services and allowed them to be both interventionist and supportive of the market (Penn 2007). Although stimulating the childcare market in deprived areas was the main aim of the Neighbourhood Nurseries, they would also ideally provide early education and family support (family learning, health education) (Smith 2007a). Funding was front loaded to enable nurseries to offer subsidised places to stimulate demand but the longer term aim was for the nurseries to become self-sustaining (Eisenstadt 2011).

The National Evaluation of the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative was published in 2007, by this time the Children's Centre Programme was becoming firmly established. Findings showed that the initiative did boost childcare numbers in some deprived areas and those families who used the nurseries had a very positive experience. The nurseries showed positive results in terms of helping parents move into work and access childcare, these results were more pronounced for lone parents using the nurseries. The take up of places was, however, very low with

only 10% of parents in the Neighbourhood Nursery areas accessing the services, the report also highlighted that there was a good deal of regional variation. In terms of longer term impacts, the evaluation found that private providers were much better at attracting paying customers so had more success in terms of financial security but were not very good at providing the additional services for disadvantaged groups. Conversely the nurseries developed by the public sector tended to have higher qualified staff and catered well for the most disadvantaged but were much less likely to achieve financial sustainability (Smith 2007a).

There was clearly some overlap in the ethos subscribed to and services provided by these initiatives, such as their commitment to an integrated approach. In many areas, Early Excellence Centres, Sure Start Local Programmes and Neighbourhood Nurseries all offered services, and in some cases, to the same families. Whilst this illustrated New Labour's attempt to address the geographical dimensions of poverty through Area Based Initiatives, it was acknowledged that parents and practitioners may have found the range and overlap of services confusing (DfES 2002a). These new initiatives joined an already complex set of provision, highlighted in the thematic review of Early Childhood Education and Care in the UK (Bertram and Pascal 1999), part of the OECD Starting Strong project that looked at the development of Early Childhood Education and Care in 12 OECD countries. Reporting in 2001 the OECD highlighted a number of areas of good practice in the UK but also raised a range of issues important for effective early years services that were not in place across many of the OECD countries. Many of these issues related to the integration of services. It recommended that integration at central level

through a single government department lead, and integration at local level through joint working of practitioners was needed to provide a clear and well co-ordinated experience for children and families.

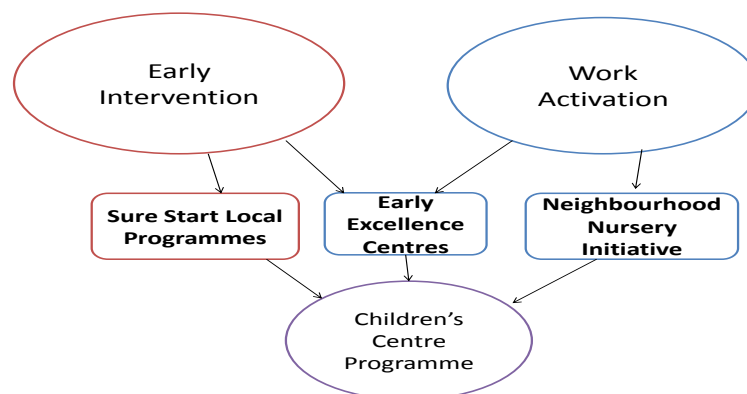
4.2.4 The Development of the Children's Centre Programme

The Interdepartmental Childcare Review held in November 2002 was set up to "...develop a vision for 2010 for childcare in England" (DfES 2002a p.8). The review discussed the Sure Start Local Programmes as an important part of the current provision but also announced the development of Children's Centres in all of the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods by 2006. In the foreword to the report, Blair states the intention to "...create new Children's Centres in disadvantaged areas, building on existing Sure Start and Early Excellence Centres to offer one stop services and good quality support to children, parents and childcare providers" (DfES 2002a p.2). Later in the review it is stated that Children's Centres will consist of: "New Build Children's Centres, expanded Neighbourhood Nurseries and expanded Sure Starts" which will come under the remit of a new inter-departmental unit (DfES 2002a, p67). The Core offer set out in the document contained many of the services already provided by the three pilot programmes and suggests that the centres could be formed through:

...adding core Sure Start services to Neighbourhood Nurseries, attaching childcare and early years education to existing Sure Starts, and re-designating existing initiatives including relevant Early Excellence Centres and co-located Sure Start / Neighbourhood

Nurseries. In this way government investment already made in these programmes can be maximised. Ultimately, the objective is for existing initiatives to be mainstreamed within a new and rebranded strategy for children (DfES 2002b p.37).

Children's Centres were envisioned as being 'service hubs' that would bring together, signpost and co-ordinate a range of services linked to young children and families (Lewis, Cuthbert and Sarre 2011). These changes were part of wider changes in children's services including the introduction of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda and the restructuring of safeguarding services. The changes described also represented the coming together of the two strands of policy discussed earlier, Early Intervention and Childcare (DfES 2002b p.38) and the increased prominence placed on the employability and work activation agenda across the OECD (Esping-Andersen 2002).



(Fig. 4.2 Policy Strands Contributing to the Children's Centre Programme)

There was clarity from those interviewed at central level that the Children's Centre Programme was about bringing together the range of initiatives that had been

piloted in the first term of the New Labour government. “An attempt to start joining things up, it was all about early years and for parents it was very confusing I think the intention was to make things more consistent and pull things together” (Regional Advisor).

In their evaluation of the move from Sure Start Local Programmes to Children’s Centres Lewis, Finnegan and West (2011) highlight a number of these points and shows that the change to Children’s Centres became almost inevitable as Sure Start local programmes became out of step with wider government policy. The increasing dominance of the childcare and work agenda rather than individual relationships within families, the problem of so many disadvantaged children not being covered by a Local Programme and the wider integration of children’s preventative services through the Every Child Matters agenda meant that a more structured and universal model was demanded.

On a practical level this change was seen with the creation of a new interdepartmental unit, the Sure Start, early years and Childcare Unit which also saw a shift in cross departmental responsibility arrangements. The new unit was now the joint responsibility of the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Work and Pensions (replacing the Department of Health), recognising the increased significance of the parental employment agenda (Lewis 2011).

Alongside the new government unit there was a new conception of Sure Start. The old and new Sure Starts were described in an information leaflet produced in December 2002:

The first Sure Start programme, which was announced in 1998, has worked by bringing together early education, childcare, health and family support to give a Sure Start to young children living in disadvantaged areas.

The new Sure Start ...will bring together universal, free, early education and more and better childcare, with greater support where there is greater need through childcare tax credit, Children's Centres and ongoing support for Start local programmes. (DfES 2002b p.2)

Re-inventing or re-conceptualising Sure Start was achieved by moving from a specific (although fluid) programme to a concept; an umbrella term covering all early years services. The Sure Start vision and the Sure Start principles were put forward in both publicity material and official guidance documents during 2003 as the way in which Local Authorities would be able to mainstream the Sure Start approach.

The Sure Start Vision was for:

- Better outcomes for all **children**, and particularly, closing the gap in outcomes between children living in poverty and the wider child population

- Better outcomes for all **parents**, increased opportunity to effectively participate in the labour market, ensuring pathways out of poverty and strengthened families and communities;
- Better outcomes for **communities**, including less crime, higher productivity, a stronger labour market and the building of a civic society (DfES 2003b pp.6-7)

One of the key messages from guidance at this time (DfES 2002b, DfES 2003b DfES 2003c) was the commitment to provide universal and targeted services to improve outcomes for all children and to address issues of inequality between children. By broadening the Sure Start concept beyond the local programmes and transforming it into a set of principles and aims, the government were easily able to achieve this combination of universal and targeted services in one programme.

The Sure Start programme set out in the guidance documents and publicity material in 2003 is as follows:

- *Early Education for all, more and better childcare.*

This part of the programme included the part time early education places for three and four year olds (part of the manifesto commitment made in 1997) and the commitments made in the Childcare Challenge document to improve the quality and quantity and affordability of childcare places in order to assist parents in to or back to work.

- *Local Programmes making a difference.*

This section of the programme refers to the establishment of Children's Centres in disadvantaged areas and the ongoing work of the Sure Start Local programmes.

(DfES 2003b p.6)

The first set of initiatives was never constructed as being part of Sure Start. Re-framing in this way allowed the government to remain committed to tackling the issue of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty in a number of different ways but to do it under one name which by this point had become popular and recognisable both within and outside of parliament.

In the period between its announcement in 2002 and its enactment in 2006, the Children's Centre Programme continued to develop. The ideas proposed in the 2002 inter-departmental review were quickly transferred into guidance for local authorities however the documentation suggests that ideas were not fully formed and that the policy stream was still fluid at this point.

The first guidance for Local Authorities was in line with the decisions made through the inter-departmental review and announced in Parliament by Stephen Twigg (Parliamentary Under-Secretary Department for Education and Skills). The Children's Centres were a new initiative that built on the success of previous pilot programmes.

On 11 December [2002] the government launched the new Sure Start programme (in England) which will support families from pregnancy until children are 14. The new Sure Start will bring together universal, free, early education and more and better child care, with greater support where there is greater need, through child care tax credit, Children's Centres, and on-going support for Sure Start local programmes. (House of Commons 2003)

In the start up guidance for Children's Centres issued in February 2003 there is an expectation that "most Children's Centres will be developed from Sure Start local programmes, Neighbourhood Nurseries and Early Excellence Centres"(DfES 2003a p.3). The initial Sure Start guidance issued to Local Authorities in November 2003, introduced the idea of "the Sure Start vision" and "Sure Start Principles" but reiterated the fact that Sure Start Local Programmes (many of which had been given the guarantee of 10 years of funding) would continue to exist in their present form and support the development of the Children's Centres, giving the impression that the Children's Centres were a separate initiative. Throughout the guidance documents issued in 2003 (DfES 2003 a,b,c), there are a variety of descriptions of the relationship between Local Programmes and Children's Centres and by the time Margaret Hodge (Minister for Children) reported to the Education and Skills select committee in 2005 Children's Centres were described as a roll out of a "...nationwide [programme going] from 500 to 3,500 Sure Start Children's Centres"

(House of Commons 2005 Q485). Discussions at a number of select committee meetings focused clearly on justifying the changes being made to Sure Start Local Programmes, there were few mentions of Early Excellence Centres or Neighbourhood Nurseries. This was a very different conception to the one described three years earlier in the inter-departmental review, as "... a focal point for rationalising a wide range of existing community-based initiatives..."(2002 p.38). If the development of the Children's Centre Programme had been communicated as an end to a range of pilot programmes and the development of a new programme based on anecdotal evidence gained from those pilots, there may have been less confusion at practitioner level but many more difficult questions at national level.

Due to the Children Centre programme being framed as a continuation of the Sure Start Local Programmes much of the academic debate has focused on the difference between the two programmes and the difficulties faced by some Local Programmes in making the transition to Children's Centres (Lewis 2011, Lewis, Roberts and Finnegan 2011). These changes were problematic in the way that they shifted the focus of the local programmes and challenged the locally identified needs of parents, particularly in the more focused outcomes around work activation and childcare (Bagley 2011). On a practical level, new Children's Centres (phase 1) were required to have full day childcare provision (DfES 2003c). Many Sure Start Local Programmes had not provided any childcare and did not have the capacity to do so without undertaking major capital builds. The other significant difference was in the governance of the Children's Centres at a local level, which saw a cut in funding compared to Sure Start Local Programmes and a reliance on

the local authority to manage and allocate budgets. Autonomy from the local authority was seen as the reason that Local Programmes could be as innovative as they often were and there were fears that a transfer of funding through the local authority would lead to a standardised and limited service (Glass 2006). However, as the government's aim was to integrate and provide a coherent system it was unrealistic to expect that the Children's Centres could be both integral to and separate from other services in the sector (Eisenstadt 2011).

The decision to portray the roll out of the Children's Centre Programme as a continuation of the local programmes also caused confusion for those working in local programmes, and led to some difficulties at local level. The original decision to have the local programmes separate from the local authorities had caused some tensions, the decision to have the new Children's Centres integrated into the local authority framework also created some problems with implementation:

...some managers won't or can't understand, some still hold on to being a Local Programme, especially with some of the local programmes run by small local voluntary sector organisations or private or community organisations, they perceived that ...because they didn't trust the local authority and were resistant to change and didn't understand or hear the national message you have some that are still fighting... (Regional Advisor).

In terms of the transition to Children's Centres for Neighbourhood Nurseries, the evaluation suggests that by 2005 27% of Neighbourhood Nurseries were designated as main Children's Centres and 22% were linked to a Children's Centre. The evaluation report of 2007 does not discuss any particular difficulties in the transition but it is noted that transition was varied across sectors which fits with findings about inconsistency in services offered between nurseries (Smith 2007a).

Transition for the Early Excellence Centres in deprived areas was less problematic. In the final report of the three year evaluation it was stated that "...[t]he pilot Early Excellence Centres are well established and many already meet the requirements of the Children's Centres core offer and often go well beyond in the range and nature of the services currently available"(Bertram et.al2004 p143). Even so, not all of the Early Excellence Centres had been established in deprived areas and so some were not eligible to become Children's Centres until later in the programme (DfES 2003a). It may be more accurate, then, to see the Children's Centre Programme as the rolling out of the Early Excellence Centres, incorporating aspects of the Local Programmes. However, by the time the Children's Centre Programme was fully implemented in 2006, Sure Start, unlike the other pilot initiatives, had become a household name and indicative of New Labour's approach.

It is clear then, that the development of the Children's Centre Programme was complex and at times fluid. The development of a new national policy in a relatively new policy area will always be challenging and decisions made at national level, taken at face value, may not be clear at local level without an understanding of the wide range of less obvious pressures. Participants involved at national level,

and government documents from the time, are clear that the Children's Centre Programme was a coming together of a range of initiatives and not a continuation of the Sure Start Local Programmes. There was, however, a consensus amongst participants that due to wider political pressures the government began to frame the change as a continuation rather than a change. The decisions to communicate the development of the Children's Centres as a continuation of Sure Start Local Programmes and keep the Sure Start label, enabled the government to retain 'face' over a hugely expensive range of initiatives and remain a government who demonstrated evidence based policy-making.

The complexity of the development of the Children's Centre Programme raises many questions about drivers of policy development. The Children's Centres that appeared in 2006 onwards were not an idea conceived in 1997 that just took a long time to develop. The structure, aims and objectives of the Children's Centre Programme developed over the first two terms of New Labour governments and were impacted on by a wide range of factors. Although this type of policy change may be described as incremental as opposed to rapid, the developments are more accurately described as an evolutionary process as the three streams that Kingdon describes, developed and interacted in a much less predictable way than the label of incrementalism suggests. The way that the specific elements of Kingdon's (1995) streams interacted will be the focus of the next part of this chapter.

4.3 The Impact of the Political Stream on the Policy Stream

Kingdon (1995) is clear that the policy stream is particularly important in the process of alternative selection but that the driver of policy change is likely to be

the problem or political stream. In the case of the Children's Centre Programme, the political stream was not simply significant in opening a window of opportunity. Even after the 1997 election, the political stream continued to impact on developments in the policy stream: in the interpretation of the criteria needed for a policy to survive, in the ideological framework provided which shaped the types of policy intervention that were favoured and the nature of the policy-making process itself and in the way that certain parts of the national mood were interpreted and acted on. This section of the thesis will look at these elements of the political stream in more detail.

4.3.1 Policy Survival

Kingdon's (1995) work includes discussion about criteria for survival, the conditions that allow a policy to be chosen and / or enacted. Kingdon discusses these criteria as existing within the policy stream and describes the selection process as a way that "... order is developed from chaos, pattern from randomness" (P.200). He describes a process whereby policy is only seriously considered if it meets most, if not all, of the criteria in place which include: technical feasibility, congruence with the values of community members, public acceptability, and political receptivity. These criteria are applied in the policy stream; however, the political stream is crucial in interpreting the criteria. In the UK party political system the ideological position of the government will act as a filter so that only those policies that are seen to fit with the government's position will be given serious consideration. Other policies may be considered and taken on by opposition parties but will not be acted on unless those parties gain power. As highlighted above, the Third Way

position of the New Labour government ensured that a wide range of policy ideas made it through the filter to be considered. In the case of the early years developments the position of 'what matters is what works', suggesting policies were only judged on their own merit is misleading. With a problem as wide ranging and complex as Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty, or even the simpler version of child poverty there is no clear answer to the question of 'what works?', there is no clear cause and effect logic (Exworthy et al. 2002).

Kingdon suggests that, although the idea of a policy might be accepted the practical feasibility of the policy is important in its acceptance onto the agenda. Technical feasibility and also acceptability in terms of values and ideology, at both central and local levels are needed for the policy to survive. In an area new to formal policy-making the question of feasibility is interesting. In some ways if early years policy is linked to education and thought of as an earlier stage to formal education then it may seem feasible; an extension of the nursery school model. However Sure Start Local Programmes, Early Excellence Centres and Neighbourhood Nurseries were based on ideas of interdisciplinary, inter agency working. Although based on innovative work in small pockets in the early years field, the point was raised by a number of those interviewed that what England did, had not been done before. There was no precedent to suggest that it was feasible especially on a large scale:

...so you have all of these initiatives that came out in 1997, all at the same time but driven from different parts of government, but overseen by this big overall ambition to eradicate child poverty and support family

life a bit better and they were experimenting, they were all pilot programmes; even Sure Start Local Programmes were a pilot although they had a longer time than the Early Excellence Centres which had three years to try out and learn how to make it work... All serious stuff that England had never seen before, but all pilot programmes to see how to do it as we hadn't had anything like this before (Ministerial Advisor).

The fact that the early initiatives were labelled as pilots raised the expectation that feasibility would be judged by evaluating the pilot projects, however, the expansion of the Local Programme target from 250 to 500 and the announcement to roll out a national programme in the inter-departmental review (2002) were made before any of the pilot programme evaluations had reported (NESS 2005, Smith 2007a, Bertram et. al 2004). In addition, although the Children's Centre Programme had already been announced, and in some cases changes at the front line had already begun, when early reports on child and family impact were received from the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS 2005) they did not initially seem to support the strong commitment to the early intervention projects:

The first evaluation that was mixed, was enormously influential in the move to Children's Centres in trying to create a more standardised offer... I feel really proud of the fact that we commissioned a very

expensive evaluation that didn't give us the results we hoped for but ministers held their nerve and said how can we learn from this and make it better (Senior Civil Servant).

Although committed to evidence based policy this was clearly an act of faith by the New Labour government driven by ideological and political elements in the political stream. The term "holding their nerve" was used by others when discussing the reaction of those in government to the early evaluations. Rather than their continued commitment to the programme being seen as a disregard of the evidence, it was seen as strength, that they could carry on based on principle. Later evaluation reports validated this act of faith as they showed positive outcomes for children, parents and communities (NESS 2008, 2010).

A number of those interviewed at central and local levels, commented on the fact that the long term nature of change being worked on with the early years programmes, and the political need for quick results was a poor combination. Political decisions were however, seen as being beneficial in some circumstances. One participant acknowledged that at the time of the decision to expand the Sure Start programme, she was concerned about the lack of available evidence to support the decision; however, with hindsight she was able to see the benefit of the political decision.

Politicians work on electoral cycles and they knew they didn't have much time and my view now is that if we hadn't expanded when we did Sure Start would

have just come and gone, if it remained small it would
have been easy to take it away, if it is big with more
and more people on the ground liking it, it gets much
harder to take away. (Senior Civil Servant)

In terms of Kingdon's criteria, the strength of the value acceptance could be seen to balance out the weakness of the evidence of technical feasibility. Early Intervention was central to the New Labour project and the framing of the problem as an economic and wider social problem allowed the acceptance of state intervention which previously may have been rejected in the neo-liberal paradigm. In addition the process of modernisation of the policy-making process meant that those people involved in early years were involved in the development of the policy so acceptance by the wider policy community was less problematic.

Another criterion for survival highlighted by Kingdon is tolerable cost which, as highlighted earlier, is a term that is open to interpretation. There are a number of things about the early years developments that are important here. First, the issue of cost is complicated by there being no benchmark for the initiatives that were enacted in the run up to the Children's Centre Programme. They were not expansions of existing programmes where the government could decide to increase spending by a particular percentage point. Initially spending was justified by the amount of money that would eventually be saved by the early intervention, social investment approach. Working on the data from the studies of the American early intervention programmes there was a suggestion that money spent early saved up to seven times later (Blair 1996). As discussed earlier, the validity and applicability

of the American research in relation to the UK situation has been challenged but the belief, ideological stance and political commitment to early intervention meant that the cost could be tolerated. In some ways the large amounts of money could also be seen to reinforce the importance of the issue and the level of commitment that the government had, justifying its place on the policy agenda. When the Children's Centre Programme was announced and centres were to cover the 20% most deprived and then the 30% most deprived areas money did indeed become an issue. By this point the economy had started to slow and it was accepted that in order to extend the programme the amount of money spent on each programme would need to be cut, although overall spending increased (Eisenstadt 2011). Although the New Labour government prided itself on making evidence based policy decisions (Dorey 2005), the experience of the Children's Centre Programme shows that in this case it was ideology and public support rather than evidence that drove the programme.

4.3.2 Political Ideology

Political Manifesto

In the UK system the strength of political mandate is a key factor in policy development. A government is expected (to a large extent) to follow the manifesto commitments set out during the election campaign and although this is not a legal requirement, any party wishing to be re-elected knows that to be seen to follow manifesto commitments is important. Hill (2005) highlights that the New Labour government met the majority of manifesto targets set in 1997, partly due to the large majority in the House of Commons and the level of preparedness with

which the party entered government. There was a manifesto commitment to expand free part time nursery places for 4 year olds and to pilot the Early Excellence Centre programme; both of these were acted on. Hill (2005) goes on to suggest that in understanding the policy-making process it is perhaps more important to analyse those policies enacted that were not originally on the agenda. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the target of addressing child poverty was not a manifesto commitment (it was introduced by the prime minister in a March 1999 speech), nor was there a commitment to an extensive programme of early intervention through the transformation of the early years sector, although the minister interviewed indicated that discussions around these developments had occurred before the 1997 election. In a discussion of why some policy items may not be mentioned in the manifesto but are acted on later, Hill (2005) identifies a range of reasons. One that is particularly relevant here is where the policy may benefit an unpopular minority. Any commitment to enact policy in the area of 'welfare' has the potential to meet with opposition, especially in the run up to the 1997 election when, in the preceding years, the poor had been vilified as scroungers and work shy. It is not surprising then, that there was no commitment to address Cycles of Disadvantage in the manifesto, instead broader commitments to social justice and equal opportunities were promised.

Using such broad terms allowed a wide range of policy to be seen as part of the government's mandate even though there had been no mention of them in the pre-election manifesto. Taking this further the prime minister's commitment to eradicate child poverty within a generation set the benchmark for anti poverty

strategies to be accepted as part of the government's agenda. Once the problem had been framed in the idea of child poverty, as it was such a wide ranging issue, any policy that could be shown to address the issue had more chance of being adopted. One example of this was the issue of improving childcare which was highlighted in the manifesto as a firm commitment but initially not explicitly linked to the Cycles of Disadvantage agenda. Improving childcare was initially a way to improve the lives of women through extending their choices as mothers and improve the economy by enabling women to continue or take up work after having children. It wasn't until the problem of 'child poverty' had been firmly established on the policy-making agenda that these issues were attached to it. The development of the Sure Start approach and the Sure Start principles also support this point as the Children's Centres were identified as being a way to address a whole range of other social problems now linked to child poverty.

Structuration

It was shown in the previous chapter that Giddens' ideas of structuration were important in shaping government thinking on the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty. These ideas were also important in understanding the way that structure and agency discussions were used more broadly in the development of policy. Although Giddens' writings on structuration are extensive, the points discussed briefly here are significant in the transformation of the early years sector undertaken by the New Labour government. The decision to take structural factors seriously, and take them on as the job of government, can be seen as an attempt to change the structural circumstances of the poor. The area

based initiatives of Sure Start Local Programmes, New Deals for Communities, Education and Health Action zones all attempted to improve the circumstances within which individuals were living. The hoped for outcome was that changes in the structural factors would lead to changes in social action and behaviour (Glass 1999). Alongside this were attempts to increase people's understanding of their situation and the factors that impacted on them; their 'knowledgeability'. This was especially true of schemes which attempted to educate parents about the way that their behaviour impacted on their children, again with an understanding that increased knowledge would lead to better reflexivity and changes in social practice (Churchill 2011b). Discussions of the early initiatives, especially the Local Programmes, in interviews with front line workers suggest that for some families these ideas rang true; however for others the lack of structure and targeted work meant that although parents valued the services, their social practices changed little if at all:

I can think of a group of parents who came to everything that we did and you could see some improvements but now 4-5 years on and we are still working with those families ... No lasting improvement
(Children's Centre Manager).

This links to criticism raised earlier about Giddens' belief that individuals are always in a position to act to change their situation. Alongside the 'life changing' stories from parent users of Sure Start programmes was a small but significant narrative of parents who did not engage 'properly' with services.

The government position was that all parents wanted what was best for their children, and that the government was willing to provide support in achieving this aim. If parents resisted attempts to support them they could be framed as unreasonable, un-caring and selfish which then justified coercion (Gillies 2008). These ideas can be seen to be connected to the shift in the problem stream described in the previous chapter where feedback from policy outcomes, and impacts of other structural factors resulted in debates shifting to discussions of parents being unwilling to take opportunities that they were offered (Gillies 2008). Challenging the ideas behind this position, a number of authors (Barlow and Duncan 2001, Driver and Martell 2002, Gewirtz 2001) suggest that this approach is essentially flawed, being based on the idea that parents are simply refusing to do what is best for their children. Their research suggests that far from this, many working class parents make rational choices based on what is best for their children in their individual circumstances, but that these decisions are often characterised as 'wrong' by those in government and the media. The extension of parenting classes and interventions further contributed to this problem as:

Parenting is no longer accepted as merely an interpersonal bond characterized by love and care. Instead it has been reframed as a job requiring particular skills and expertise which must be taught by formally qualified professionals (Gillies 2008 p.95).

Giddens' ideas of structuration were important in the development of policy in the early years, especially in the first term of the New Labour government. Policies

showed a positive commitment to improving structural factors, but this approach increasingly moved towards incorporating a more individualistic approach to addressing the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the Third Way ideology allowed for this shift and for further development in the problem and policy stream within a 'what matters is what works' approach.

A New Approach to Policy-making

The pragmatic, Third Way approach meant that the process of policy-making was also targeted as being an area for negotiation. The New Labour government was committed to "...a new and more creative approach to policy-making" (Cabinet Office 1999 p.16). Very early on, the idea of 'joined up government' was advocated and a number of thematic reviews of policy areas were undertaken followed by various forms of cross department working (including Sure Start). New Labour criticised the traditional top-down approach to policy-making suggesting that this was part of the reason why long standing entrenched social problems had not been addressed (Durose 2011). The Modernising government white paper makes it clear that the government wanted a policy-making process that was innovative, forward thinking and open to a whole range of new ideas and approaches (Bochel and Duncan 2007). It also showed that the government were willing to encourage a range of actors to become involved in the process:

...this means developing new relationships between
Whitehall, the devolved administrations, local
government and the voluntary and private sectors;
consulting outside experts, those who implement

policy and those affected by it early in the policy-making process so we can develop policies that are deliverable from the start (Cabinet Office 1999 p16).

This new approach to policy-making advocated joined up solutions to joined up problems. It had a significant impact on the development of the Children's Centre Programme and the initiatives that it grew out of (Massey and Rentoul 2007). The cross department review into services for young children took place at the beginning of the first term of office and was one of the first signs of a commitment to joined up government. The necessity of taking this approach was acknowledged by those interviewed at strategic and front line levels, based on an understanding of the limitations of previous fragmented approaches in the early years field. The practicalities of joined up government were in the early stages, the decision to have the Sure Start programme across two departments was innovative and marked the acknowledgement that the issue to be dealt with needed the input of more than one department. The newness of this way of working was raised by those worked at central level and supported by comments made in the House of Commons (House of Commons 2002a) related to the difficulty of MPs gaining answers to parliamentary questions with these new sorts of complex arrangements. Although the cross departmental approach was taken in terms of Sure Start, this sort of joined up working was not applied to the whole of the early years field until some years later when the three pilot programmes were brought together into the Children's Centre Programme and the Department of Sure Start, early years and Childcare was created.

The role of the Treasury was also important in the development of the Children's Centre Programme. The Treasury, under the New Labour government, was seen as far more than the department that held the money. By taking a more strategic approach, it was felt that the Treasury could be central in achieving the cross cutting aims of joined up solutions to joined up problems that the government sought (Parry and Kerr 2007). The active involvement of treasury officials in engaging with policy projects 'on the ground' was raised by a number of those interviewed as being highly significant. One former Children's Centre Manager recalled how important this personal input was:

Norman Glass; we struck up a relationship with him
and we had some sort of celebration when he came to
visit and he said "this is just how I thought it would be"
We were very reassured. We knew where we were,
knew our core business.

In the field of early years it was suggested that it was these sorts of visits to the projects and meetings with families and staff that allowed the work that the early years sector did to be recognised and valued (Eisenstadt 2011).

Political ideology proved to be very important in the way that policy developed and adds credibility to Kingdon's (1995) idea of 'the time being right' with a combination of a strong mandate and a clear ideological position in support of rethinking old problems and old ways of policy-making.

4.3.3 National mood

The complexity of reading and using public opinion comes in two forms, first in the evidence or reading of the national mood and second in the inconsistency of the mood. The measure of the public mood comes from a range of sources: opinion polls, social media, newspapers, and from MPs discussions with constituents.

Clearly none of these sources give a precise measure of opinion across the electorate and may be skewed by the self selecting nature of many of those involved. At a broad level, the size of the New Labour majority in 1997 on a strong mandate for change gave a clear indication of the general public mood and paved the way for significant changes in policy. The strength of this mandate should not be underestimated and was put forward by those interviewed at national level as highly significant in the pace of change in the first term in office. The introduction of a number of early intervention and childcare pilot projects could certainly be linked to the confidence that such a strong mandate brought the new Labour government. It was highlighted above that the expansion of the Sure Start targets from 250 – 500 so quickly, along with the announcement that the Children's Centre Programme would be rolled out before any evaluation evidence was available, was in part linked to the public mood which appeared to show a high level of support for the early intervention strategy. This was evident from the discussions in parliament where stories of the life changing nature of Sure Start were common place.

The second complexity in reading the public mood is linked with the wide range of public opinion and the fact that at times it will be contradictory. For example, there

may be a general public feeling that the government should not be involved in family life, should not tell parents how to bring up their children. In specific policy issues, however, for example dealing with truancy or anti-social behaviour there may be strong public support for the government to step in and 'do something about these families' advocating high levels of state intervention in family life. These contradictions are changeable and influenced by significant, and perhaps unexpected, events and the media coverage of them so are often hard to predict. So, while it is important for governments to be in step with general public opinion, it is difficult and undesirable for them to make decisions solely to stay in line with one particular aspect of public opinion.

For the New Labour government (and Tony Blair in particular) the national mood was more significant than it had previously been. The nature of the relationship with the press and Blair's concern to attract and retain non traditional middle class voters has received a good deal of coverage (Bevir and Rhodes 2006, Rummery et.al 2002, Dean 2013). In this context, the impact of the positive feedback about the early years initiatives, especially Sure Start Local Programmes, reported in the Commons and the press should not be underestimated. The announcement to extend the Children's Centre Programme ensured that the middle class voters, previously excluded from these services, could also be counted on for support. At the same time, there were those who were critical of the level of state intervention and funding that the early years' policies involved and these pressures should also not be underestimated (Kirby 2006). The term "quiet revolution" was used by a number of those interviewed with a suggestion that this was due to the perceived

pressures of the media and some areas of public opinion. There were elements of the early years programmes that were likely to gain the support of the general public, especially the focus on children (the deserving poor) and the social and economic investment arguments. At the same time the significant increase in state intervention that the Children's Centre Programme represented was not welcomed by all. As discussed earlier, there were arguments around: state surveillance (Gillies 2008, Parton 2008, Gewirtz 2001) and a return to the nanny state of old Labour. The media's continued focus on problem families and benefit dependency and the 'nanny state' was a continued pressure (Dean 2013).

The development of the Children's Centre Programme had the potential to play into the hands of the government's critics; a national Children's Centre Programme was very different from a range of early years initiatives delivered by a range of providers. A universal programme, a further extension of the welfare state, although welcomed by many had the potential to appear overly interventionist. These concerns were seen to have an impact on the way that the government communicated the changes:

Was the transition managed well at local level or national level? Not as well as it could have been but there were reasons around that. Government didn't explain and communicate well in these areas as [they were] scared of being accused of nanny state, redistribution, supporting the feckless poor, they were frightened of the press and also the lobbying that was

going on from the tax payers alliance and private sector so they got on quietly but didn't make a fuss (Ministerial Advisor).

The impact of the media is significant here. It was highlighted previously that the role of the media in the policy-making process during this period was significant (Hill 2005) but Dean (2013) suggests that in the area of poverty the media had a dampening rather than an inflating impact. Rather than reporting on the significant investment that was being made in the name of social investment or on the positive outcomes in relation to lifting families out of poverty, especially in the first term of office, the media continued to focus on more sensational stories of benefit cheats, problem families and any sign of political difference within the government in relation to these policy areas.

4.4 The Impact of Individuals – Political and Policy Stream

In the description of alternative selection, Kingdon (1995) highlights the key role played by hidden participants: junior ministers, civil servants and policy advisors who often act as policy entrepreneurs, pushing and shaping certain policy options. The term hidden relates primarily to the fact that these participants have a lower public profile, than for example, the prime minister, a very visible participant. The fact that this influence comes from individuals makes it unpredictable and adds to the complexity of this stage of the policy process. The case study of the Children's Centre Programme supports Kingdon's (1995) research in terms of hidden participants, but alongside this, other high profile figures, and the relationships

between them, proved important in the development of policy. This section will further explore these influences.

Kingdon (1995) raises the importance of individual staff changes in departments where new people arrive with different interpretations of problems and policy solutions. This issue was raised by those interviewed as being significant in the way that different ideas about the Children's Centre policy gained prominence.

...after the election it was T and D working with treasury who defined the early Sure Start philosophy ... their take on it was very different from mine. It was about early nurture for children which I saw as a part of it but not as a whole. It was grounded in more social work practice, where I was coming from was much more about... if I say education you think I mean teaching two year old but it wasn't about that it was more about how children learn and helping them to move out of poverty through early development. They were much more about bonding, lots of talk of bonding in the early days, which is important... much more about health and social care and leaving education out of the loop (Former Minister).

This point was re-enforced by another of those interviewed who highlighted that this difference in ideas and focus continued as a number of different ministers, with

responsibility for the Children's Centre Programme, had different ideas about what it should do:

...different ministers had different ideas about what it should be, T thought it should be about nurture, M thought it should be about early education and C thought it should be about employability" (Senior Civil Servant).

Part of the reason for these differences in ideas was the wide remit of the policy which aimed to address a wide range of issues connected with poverty from a range of different approaches. This allowed the focus of the policy to shift one way or the other without the appearance of a considerable policy change. This point is very important in acknowledging that policy formation operates on a number of levels, is fluid and changeable. As in other areas of policy, for example schools and the NHS, the minister in place will implement or formulate policies that he or she personally feels to be important as well as following manifesto commitments and the wider party line. This was no different in the area of early years.

The impact of individuals and their own personal vision for Children's Centres was reinforced by others working at national level with the minister interviewed expressing her frustration that a particular idea for Children's Centres was not enacted, "I was furious that I was moved from [previous position], if I had had that job for another couple of years I would have won the battle but I was moved, to my utter fury".

It was also highlighted however, that this change in ministers was not necessarily connected to their views fitting with the wider vision for early years and Children's Centres. It was connected more with wider elements of the political stream:

Re-shuffles were not connected to Sure Start they were done on the basis of keeping people happy in different areas of the party and for most Sure Start was a very small part of their job (Senior Civil Servant).

One of the key things that was highlighted by those interviewed at central level as being important in the way that the early years policies developed, was the fact that civil servants and especially treasury officials, came to look at the work that was being done at front line level and those with experience of working in the field were taken on as civil servants and policy advisors. Policy advisors were mentioned in a previous chapter as being an integral part of the core executive and it is highlighted by a number of writers that their importance increased under the New Labour governments (Dorey 2005, Gains and Stoker 2011). Policy advisors fulfil a number of roles, not all of them linked to policy development. Those that are, play a crucial role either as policy entrepreneurs promoting or advocating a particular policy route, or in advising ministers on the elements in the policy or political stream that will impact on their commitment to a particular policy approach. As the early years field had not previously been such a major focus for any government, the involvement of early years specialists as policy advisors was important in order to allow ministers to draw on existing knowledge in the field (Eisenstadt 2011). This overlap between policy makers and implementers, as well

as the cross department working, especially the involvement of the treasury, can be seen as being exactly what the New Labour modernisation paper talked about when it discussed new ways of policy-making.

Within this group of hidden participants, Kingdon (1995) identifies that some will be what he describes as policy entrepreneurs who have a particular attachment to one or other policy and put a lot of time and effort into promoting that policy over others. Some of those involved in the development of the Children's Centres could certainly be described as policy entrepreneurs. For example, Margaret Hodge (Former Children's Minister) was a strong supporter of the Early Excellence Centres and campaigned for many years to get them recognised (Eisenstadt 2011), Tessa Jowell continued to be a strong advocate of the Sure Start ideals, Naomi Eisenstadt as head of the Sure Start Unit was a key driving force in the development of policy and, writing about the Sure Start project in 1999 and 2006, it is clear that Norman Glass (a senior civil servant at the Treasury) was personally convinced and firmly committed to the principles of the Sure Start agenda. A number of those interviewed at central and local level named Eisenstadt and Glass specifically as being highly influential in the development of the Sure Start programme.

When discussing policy entrepreneurs Kingdon (1995) identifies that there are a variety of reasons for individuals to become active in promoting policies. Some, he suggests, are less interested in the outcomes of policy but more in the personal gain involved, in terms of job security or promotion. Clearly this may be the case for any individual involved in the Children's Centre Programme and the nature of face to face research is that individuals are unlikely to suggest this as a primary

reason for their actions. However, the case study evidence suggests that those involved in policy development linked to the Children's Centres, especially in the early days, were driven by a more ideological push and supports Kingdon's (1995) suggestion that some policy entrepreneurs become involved in policy formation as a way to promote their own values and beliefs, their own ideological stance. Asked about the reasons why early years policies become so prominent on the New Labour agenda the former minister explained:

"I think the presence of a whole load of us women who understood it was absolutely key to prioritising it – so you can look at a whole bunch of the women politicians because we were mums with me it was the stuff I had done in [local authority] and being a mum, with T it was her work as a social worker ... O was a key contributor. But it was all women, H was always about lone parents; work being a way out of poverty, C... there were a whole lot of us feminists with a clear ...agenda.

As highlighted in the previous section the problem of Cycles of Deprivation and persistent poverty is heavily value laden as are the policy solutions. Many of those involved in the case study at national and local level had been keen to see the value of the early years sector improve and for it to be taken seriously by those in government. Many were driven by a firm belief in the importance of early

intervention, and even those who expressed dissatisfaction with certain policy approaches were happy with the focus on the sector.

Although in Kingdon's analysis high profile figures like the prime minister are involved in the agenda setting phase, rather than the nuts and bolts of policy selection, it is clear that in the case of the New Labour government this analysis does not necessarily provide the full story. As already highlighted above, senior ministers were influential in the direction that the early years programmes took and discussions of Blair's leadership style have suggested that he was also influential in the detail of policy-making and delivery and his relationships with others, within the core executive, were significant in the decisions that were made about specific policies (Smith et al. 2011). The increased role of the Treasury in domestic policy-making is in large part attributed to the relationship between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown (Eisenstadt 2011, Bevir and Rhodes 2006). The personal commitment that Chancellor Gordon Brown had to addressing the issue of poverty, and the social investment approach, alongside the increased influence that the treasury was granted meant that Kingdon's 'tolerable cost' criteria for policy survival became heavily influenced by personal factors related to these highly visible actors. There are many accounts of the fraught relationship between the Prime Minister Tony Blair and the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown and some accounts of policy being put forward or supported to gain personal points against the other man (Bever and Rhodes 2006). In the case of the development of early years the competing agendas of early intervention and work activation, Sure Start Local Programmes, Early Excellence Centres, Neighbourhood Nurseries; area

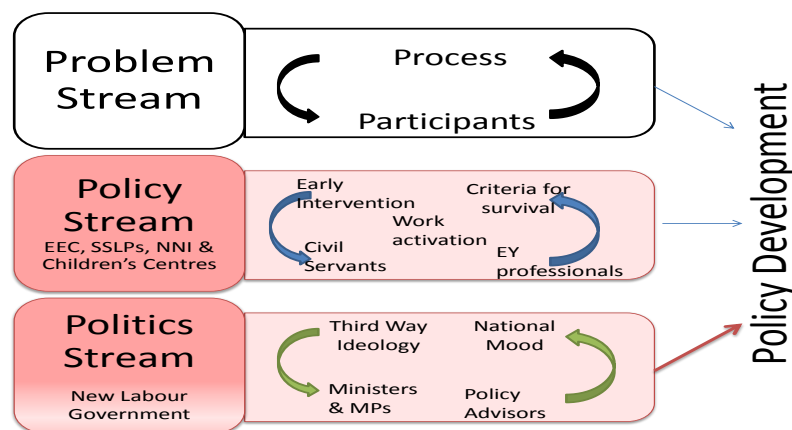
based and universal services were all influenced by visible participants (Eisenstadt 2011) and not simply worked out by civil servants and the policy community as suggested by Kingdon.

4.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to meet research objectives one and two: *to identify the range of factors that drove New Labour's understanding of, and policy responses to, the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage in families with children and to analyse the development of the Children's Centre Programme using existing theories of policy-making and implementation.*

Academic sources, government documentation and data from interviews with individuals involved with the development of the Children's Centre Programme at central level, have all been used to provide a rich analysis of the development of the Children's Centre Programme and the pilot programmes from which it grew. This has been done within Kingdon's alternative selection framework which explores the way that policies get selected from the 'primeval soup' to be coupled with problems. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty became established on the government agenda with the election of the New Labour government in 1997. Although a range of policies were attached to this problem, those relating to the early years field were prominent. This chapter has shown how, initially, 'pilot' policies put in place focused on two distinct areas: early intervention and work activation. These two approaches eventually came together in the Children's Centre Programme from 2006.

In the case of alternative selection Kingdon (1995) sets out a framework that has the policy stream at its centre with a range of structural processes and hidden participants, mostly policy entrepreneurs that interact to produce policy that can be coupled with problems when the time is right. Kingdon acknowledges that there are elements of the political stream that impact here however, he suggests that as the policy stream runs relatively independently from both the problem and political stream these political elements are not overly significant. In the case of the Children's Centre Programme and the policies from which it grew, Kingdon's model appears to underplay the influence of the political stream, as this case study shows that the political stream is pivotal at all levels.



(Fig. 4.3 Prominent Elements in the 'Alternative Selection' Process in the Case of the Children's Centre Programme)

First, in shaping the policy stream, elements of the political stream influence the criteria by which policies are judged. Ideas about whether policies are viable and tolerable are not objective decisions; ideological standpoints will always impact on these assessments as in the case of the Children's Centre Programme. The fact that

the Children's Centre Programme was put in place before the pilots had reported, questions the basis for the belief that the programme could be technically feasible. Evidence provided at the CASE conferences (1998, 1999) showed that the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty would take a long time to shift and this raises issues about the conflict between the generational and electoral cycle. It was highlighted above that politicians and front line workers were fully aware that the change that they hoped to get from the early years initiatives would not be seen for at least a generation, if not more. However, some of the decisions to extend the programme before firm evidence was gathered were based on the pressures of the electoral cycle. These decisions cannot simply be attributed to the strength of the policy, and must instead be seen as part of the impact of the political stream.

Second, in this case, elements of New Labour's Third Way ideology impacted on a range of areas which influenced policy development. The strength of the electoral victory in 1997 and (although to a lesser extent) 2001 meant that the new government were able to exceed their manifesto commitments and develop a whole range of policies to address issues that had previously been seen as too large, complex or entrenched to be dealt with by government. In addition, Giddens' ideas of structuration were initially highly significant in the choice of policy alternatives: large scale, government funded policies and initiatives aimed at addressing structural causes of inequality dominated early policy development. Although a combination of policy feedback and shifts in public opinion led to more focus on individual issues alongside these structural issues, the structuration model

continued to provide the framework for policy development. Finally, the process of policy-making was seen as being in need of modernisation and changes included involving a wider range of participants in the process and changing the relationship between government departments. In the field of early years, a previously uncoordinated and somewhat neglected policy area, those working in the sector had limited organised influence on the policy-making process compared to other policy areas; however, in New Labour's new approach to policy-making, experts in the field were brought into government to help develop policy. Those working in early years had already been involved in innovative approaches and they were invited to share their knowledge with those in government. The altered working practices of the Treasury was another important part of the government's modernisation agenda and a number of those working at central level highlighted the central importance of the new role of the treasury in ensuring that these new ideas became policy.

Third, this chapter has shown how public opinion / the national mood or at least the interpretation of it was highly political. The concern for government action to match public opinion or the national mood was significant for the New Labour government. The balancing act of addressing the issue of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty in a way that did not appear to be overly redistributive or interventionist was difficult, and a number of those interviewed used the term 'quiet revolution' to describe the transformation of the early years sector. The high levels of public support for the Sure Start programmes and subsequent Children's Centres was clear from parliamentary and media reporting, but this was

increasingly set against tightening budgets and ideological opposition to large scale government interventions.

Finally, in line with Kingdon's model, this chapter has shown that the process of policy selection in the case of the Children's Centres was highly influenced by individuals. Hidden individuals such as civil servants, policy advisors and sector professionals were significant in shaping policy in an area previously neglected by government. In addition this chapter has shown that in this case highly visible actors in the political stream were also influential in shaping and steering policy.

Chapter 5

Implementation: the Children's Centre Programme in Mid City

5.1 Introduction

As highlighted in the theoretical framework chapter, there is a general understanding that to fully explore the policy process, research must look at both agenda setting and implementation. Kingdon's model has been shown to be valuable when looking at agenda setting and has been applied to a variety of settings beyond his own work. A much smaller number of academics have suggested that the model can also be used to look at the way that policy is implemented (Exworthy et.al 2002, Exworthy and Powell 2004, Mannheimer et.al 2007, Ridde 2009), identifying that the problem, policy and politics streams need to couple at local as well as national level. This chapter will follow these authors in applying Kingdon's streams model to local implementation of the Children's Centre Programme in one local authority.

Much of the early work on policy implementation focused on identifying the route to perfect policy implementation (Barrett 2004). However, with the acknowledgement that the policy-making process is messy and that the needs of individuals, communities and cities are different due to a range of contextual factors, the idea of perfect policy implementation becomes less significant. Kingdon's (1995) streams model is extremely useful in understanding how a wide range of factors interact at different times to produce policy outcomes and it is this understanding that will be useful in its application to the case study presented here.

Differing from other local applications of the model (Exworthy et.al 2002, Exworthy and Powell 2004, Mannheimer et.al 2007, Ridde 2009), the suggestion is not that perfect policy implementation will be achieved if the problem, policy and political streams line up at local level. Instead, this chapter will show that the application of the model at local level can contribute to understanding the way that policy implementation unfolds and the reasons why the same policy may be implemented very differently in different places. In essence, it will highlight the central importance of context.

This chapter will address the final research objective: *to analyse the role of context in understanding the development of the Children's Centre Programme at the local level*. This will be done by combining interview data and national and local documentation to provide an overview of the way that the Children's Centre Programme was implemented in one local authority area, Mid City. First, the chapter will show how the local authority responded to the rapid and extensive change in the early years field looking at their responses to, and engagement with, the Children's Centre Programme and the initiatives from which it developed. Second, context specific elements of the programme will be highlighted in order to show how the local authority and front line workers interpreted the central policy. Finally, using Kingdon's (1995) framework, the chapter will highlight the range of contributory factors that were significant in the implementation process within this local authority. It will be shown that in this case, elements of the central and local political stream, alongside the influence of particular individuals were the driving factors in the programme. In line with the focus of the thesis, this chapter will

show how Kingdon's streams model can be used to understand the implementation of the Children's Centre Programme in one local authority area and in turn can provide a framework for understanding how local conditions mediate the implementation of central policy.

It is clear that the problem and policy agenda at central level sets the agenda at local level. The government's decisions to focus on Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty meant that these issues automatically arrived on the local agenda. The decision to introduce Sure Start Local Programmes, Early Excellence Centres and Neighbourhood Nurseries was made at central level. Although, as highlighted in the previous chapter the policy development process did have the input of experienced early years practitioners, the policy was centrally decided and local authorities were obliged to implement the new policy framework. The focus in terms of the problem and policy streams falls then on the interpretation and engagement with the centrally decided policy. When discussing such a long-standing issue as the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty it is highly likely that the problem had been contemplated at local level. It may be that in some local authorities there was already a commitment to deal with the problem identified at central level but, the arrival of the issue onto the national agenda allowed the problem to be explicitly addressed at local level (Exworthy et.al 2002). It would be ridiculous to suggest that in an area as deprived as the one in the case study, the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty had not made it onto the agenda of the local authority in some form. Under the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage was

not seen as a problem to be dealt with by government so local initiatives may have been attached to other agendas. The change in focus at central level allowed the problem to be explicit and move up the agenda at local level.

Getting the problem noticed at central level also provides impetus to local policy entrepreneurs to push harder to have policies adopted, or push to have their existing provision strengthened further (Exworthy et.al 2002). A number of those working in Mid City had been involved in projects working with children and families or communities in disadvantaged areas before the early years initiatives described here. These were often small local projects, funded through third sector organisations and grants from the city council. The focus on addressing persistent poverty through early intervention connected with what they were already doing but the new projects had significant funds and status. It was not difficult then, for the problem and policy streams to couple in line with Kingdon's model, if anything there was some re-labelling to fit existing work within the new agenda. In the case study in question there was no evidence of resistance to the problem being raised on the central agenda and some saw it as an opportunity to continue their work and became involved with one or other of the pilot programmes straight away.

In terms of the political stream, Kingdon describes this as "...composed of such things as public mood, pressure group campaigns, election results, partisan or ideological distributions in Congress and changes of administration" (1995 p. 145). As highlighted in the previous chapter the nature of the political system in the UK impacts on what the political stream consists of and which elements are particularly strong. At local level this can clearly be applied to local government with a number

of factors, similar to those at central level, being significant in broad political terms. In the implementation of the Children's Centre Programme the political stream was important in two ways. First, the political stream that was active at central level impacted on the local implementation of policy. It will be shown below that ideological elements in this stream shaped the type and nature of local implementation which impacted on the development of the Children's Centre Programme. Second, the political stream at local level impacted on the day to day implementation of the policy. The position, approach and heritage of the local authority proved to be the most significant element of the political stream at local level in the case study undertaken.

5.2 The Local Context

The case study presented here was constructed using a range of documentary evidence: official plans, reports, guidance documents, meeting minutes, and evaluation reports from the City Council, as well as national guidance documents, information leaflets and local newspaper reports. Interviews for this part of the study were carried out with 15 people in total; 12 who were currently managing one or more Children's Centres, one who had managed a Local Programme but was not managing a Children's Centre and two local authority officers. Information gained from interviews with those working at regional and national level also contributed to this part of the study.

Many of New Labour's area based initiatives to tackle poverty, social exclusion and area deprivation focused on areas like Mid City. Mid City supports a largely working class population that is still feeling the effects of de-industrialisation. Historically

Mid City was a thriving industrial town; changes in the manufacturing industry that took place during the 1980s and 1990s had a huge impact on Mid City and its people (Upton 2007) and the city has consistently high levels of deprivation. In 2001, when many of the early years initiatives were beginning, out of the 20 wards in Mid City, 13 were in the 20% most deprived and of these five were in the 5% most deprived (EYDCP 2001). The percentage of children classed as living in poverty has remained around the 30% mark for a number of years, but in some of the most deprived communities this figure rises to 50% (Mid City in Profile 2013). Levels of unemployment in Mid City are consistently above the national and regional average; at the time of the Children's Centre developments the number of job seeker claimants was twice the national average at 4.8% while the rate for young people was 9.9%, above twice the national average at the time (ONS 2005). Levels of educational qualifications in the city are also problematic falling below the national average; in 2001 41% of the adult population had no qualifications (ONS 2001) and although by 2011 this figure had fallen to 31% this was still over 10% higher than the national average (ONS 2011). Alongside and connected to these factors life expectancy in Mid-City was, and continues to be, lower than the regional and national average (ONS 2005b) and the main causes of death continue to be the 'big 6' clinical conditions; coronary and heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, alcohol misuse, suicide and infant mortality (Mid City in Profile 2009).

Although the ideological and political position of the local council did not directly impact on the issues chosen for the problem and policy stream, in the case of the Children's Centre Programme it will be shown below that they are both significant

in the level of commitment the council had towards the initiatives. The party political system highlighted in the previous chapter as being so important in the development and coupling of streams is also influential at local level. The city in question has been Labour controlled since the mid 1970s with only a few isolated years when the council moved to a position of no overall control. A majority Labour council is likely to be supportive of Labour led national policies, especially those with significant levels of funding attached. During the New Labour terms in office and in addition to the early years initiatives already described, Mid City benefitted from; New Deal for Communities, Health and Education action zones, Neighbourhood Management and Community safety partnerships. All of these thematic, area based initiatives aimed to work with local communities to regenerate the City. In many respects this was building on what Mid City had already achieved. It was raised by participants that the city had a strong heritage of community development, often led by or with significant involvement of the local councillors. As highlighted in the methodology chapter these sorts of impressions and feelings attributed to a city council are hard to evidence however it should also be remembered that the individual belief in this stance is perhaps as important as the evidence to prove it.

In terms of Early Years a number of participants described their experiences of working in innovative Early Years and family provision in the City:

I developed a women's forum to look at childcare needs. What was wanted was a community nursery. I applied for money to establish a community nursery in

1991/2. Started to struggle with funding within 5 years and the manager moved on. I decided to take on the nursery myself...but felt it wasn't enough – day-care on its own wasn't enough. We were helping working parents but what about the rest of the parents. (Children's Centre Manager).

The feeling was expressed by a number of those interviewed that the developments from 1997 onwards fitted well with Mid City as they were building on existing good practice.

5.3 The Local Policy Stream

5.3.1 Developments Pre- Children's Centre Programme

Mid City became involved in the programme to transform early years early in the first New Labour government. In 1999 the first Mid City Sure Start opened as part of the Sure Start trailblazer initiative that aimed to try out the government's innovative approach to working with children and families. By 2003 Mid City had five Sure Start Local Programmes; in addition to the trailblazer opened in 1999 four more were developed in 2001, 2002 (two) and 2003. Documentation suggests that the local authority were fully engaged and supportive of the development of all five Local Programmes (Mid City Council 2006).

The City's first application for an Early Excellence Centre was turned down in 1999 however, after some reorganisation of the nursery school at the centre of the bid

the city was invited to bid again in 2001 and approval was gained in 2002.

Discussions at the council were clear that this would be an important addition to the early years provision in the city providing additional services for children and parents as well as attracting local and national attention to the area. Although the Early Excellence Centre was to be in the same ward as a Local Programme it was seen that the two would compliment and support each other, in fact it is noted that the Local Programme had contributed £85,000 to the Early Excellence Centre project by October 2002 (Mid City Council 2002b).

The Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative was seen as highly significant for Mid City and the decision was made by the early years Development Partnership to apply for additional allocation of places in the area. The target of 427 new childcare places was set in 2001 and the initiative was seen as an important step in increasing the availability of childcare and contributing to the regeneration of a number of areas of the city that were highly deprived. The detailed report submitted to cabinet in 2001 (EYDCP 2001), shows a good deal of optimism about the benefits of the programme. It also highlights the complexity of the initiative in terms of, the range of potential providers of the childcare places as well as the way in which the initiative was to be combined with other new (Local Programmes) and existing (nursery schools) provision.

With such a high level of rapidly changing activity, it is not surprising that some in the local authority and others at front line level expressed confusion over the way that the initiatives fitted together. The development of the initiatives by different departments at national level was replicated at local level with different local

authority departments and officers leading on the different projects. A local authority officer involved with the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative recalls this confusion “The first question we asked was why are they doing Sure Start local programmes?...We wondered what they would do over and above the Neighbourhood Nurseries” (Children’s Centre Manager). It was evident that working on one particular initiative did not guarantee an understanding of the other related initiatives developing at the same time.

5.3.2 Children’s Centre Development

The city’s involvement in the Local Programmes, Early Excellence Centres and Neighbourhood Nurseries is important in an understanding of the way that the Children’s Centre Programme developed. The National Guidance issued to local authorities (DfES 2003b), was clear that the Children’s Centre Programme must be developed, based on what was already in place in the authority, and to meet the specific needs of the city. It was recommended that authorities used the opportunity to audit and evaluate existing services in order to plan a programme that would integrate and contribute to existing provision. This guidance makes it clear that the Children’s Centre Programme was never intended to be a one size fits all programme, a point that will be further developed below when discussing the influence of the New Labour government on the policy-making process.

In its Strategic Proposal for Children’s Centre Development (Mid City 2004), the authority acknowledges the interplay between national and local drivers in the re-shaping of services for young children and their families. It highlights the impact of a range of area based initiatives in shaping the position that the authority starts

from with its Children's Centre development. As highlighted above, due to the high levels of deprivation, Mid City had benefited from a range of national policy which had already begun to reshape the way that services were delivered in the city with many services already being devolved to locality level (Mid City Council 2004).

Mid City gained approval for 10 Children's Centres in the first phase of the Children's Centre Programme which reflected the high level of wards in the 20% most deprived category. The National guidance (DfES 2003b) made it clear that there were a variety of ways that the Children's Centres could be developed, involving the Early Excellence Centres, Neighbourhood Nurseries and Local Programmes, although the guidance does not fully capture the complexity of trying to integrate existing services. The Children's Centre plan for Mid City showed this complexity more clearly. It was highlighted that none of the Local Programmes in the city coincide with the ward boundaries that would form the basis of Children's Centre reach areas. In addition all five Local Programmes were at different stages of development with only two of the five being in a position to provide evaluation data that may be helpful in the Children's Centre development (Mid City Council 2004). The fifth Local Programme had only been given approval in the same year that the new proposals had to be submitted (Mid City Council 2005). In addition the Neighbourhood Nursery plans had been made up to 2004 in the first instance and so some of the proposed developments had not been completed or in some cases started by the time new proposals were being drawn up.

By this time the Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Unit had been established at the Department of Education and Skills and so all guidance and direction was now

joined up and emerging from one place. At local level the Children's Centre development plan was co-ordinated through an inter-agency group made up of representatives from: the LEA, Social Services, the Voluntary Sector, the Primary Care Trust, the Identification Referral and Tracking Programme, Sure Start Local Programmes and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. In line with DfES guidance, there was one lead officer who was responsible for all communication with the regional and national officers (Mid City Council 2004). The concept of partnership working is emphasised on a number of occasions in local documentation. In part this could be due to the requirement for the authority to be transparent in its partnership arrangements (DfES 2003a) however, the impression from those working at the local authority was that there was a genuine desire to work in partnership as most had experienced the frustration that comes from disjointed work.

The decision was made by the local authority and elected councillors (the member for Children and Young People in particular) to make the transition to Children's Centres in one go, meaning that the Local Programmes would be transformed into Children's Centres and five new centres built by the 2006 deadline. This decision was made in an attempt to create one Children's Centre Programme for the City, a coherent programme with one set of policies that covered all early years services. Comments were made about the tensions that arose from this decision, especially in the change for Local Programmes (some of which were not fully developed at this point), which dealt directly with central government to Children's Centres that came under local authority control:

No it wasn't easy at all. There were a lot of meetings with the boards, with members - we had to work with the Local Programmes to help them change over to become Children's Centres; to support the transition. Some of them were less and some of them were more willing...So there was a period of tension intensely for about 6 months or a year – but the decision was made that they were more sustainable and more coherent if we had one Children's Centre Programme – one set of policies (Local Authority Officer).

As highlighted in the previous chapter this sort of tension was not unusual or confined to the local area but the majority of those interviewed agreed that the long term aim of a coherent Children's Centre Programme had been achieved.

A specific area of tension raised about the transition period at a local level was the merger of one of the local programmes with the only Early Excellence Centre in the Authority. Although on the setting up of the Early Excellence Centre, the reports to cabinet talk about the joint working of the two programmes (City Council), discussions with those at the local authority and front line acknowledged that the two initiatives developed very distinct and different approaches which made it almost impossible for the two to be merged into one Children's Centre. The decision was made that the Early Excellence Centre would become the Children's Centre and the Sure Start Local Programme would be merged into it. In the outline of phase one Children's Centres the report states that "The Children's Centre

Programme in Mid City builds on the successful work of the five Sure Start local programmes with each of these Programmes transforming into Children's Centres by the end of March 2006" (Mid City Council 2005) with no mention of the Early Excellence Centre. In the list of proposed Children's Centres later in the document however the Early Excellence Centre is listed and the Local Programme omitted. The tension described here highlights the difficulty of having two very different initiatives merging into one Children's Centre but also highlights the significance of context in determining or predicting implementation problems.

Of the ten Phase one centres, seven were located on school sites reflecting the local authority's stated desire to link the Children's Centre Programme with the existing school service and the extended schools proposals (Mid City Council 2004). But this decision was also made on practical grounds:

Another decision that was made by the local authority and members especially – that it made sense for Children's Centres to be developed on school sites. That was an active push – schools were seen as the heart of the community, it made sense to develop the Children's Centres around that. Also we had limited money so where schools had spare capacity or where there was space for expansion it made practical sense to do it there. It also made sense to develop the nursery schools as they were expensive so it seemed

wasteful to have Children's Centres and nursery schools together (Local Authority Officer).

At local level the location of Children's Centres on school sites was described quite positively although it was raised by some that a clear distinction between the centre and the school was important:

...if you have parents who have had issues with a school will they go back to a school? Or if they are being called to the school about their children and then to be invited to the Children's Centre on the same grounds it becomes difficult (Children's Centre Manager).

This links to research by Lewis, Finnegan and West (2011) around this issue, however in contrast to Lewis's research this view was held by a minority and not by those with an education background or those who were involved in Children's Centres on school sites. At the time of the research 14 of the 18 Children's Centres in the city were on school or nursery school sites, and for the majority this link was positive although, as will be highlighted later, there were some tensions early on in terms of individual's focus linked to professional heritage.

The list of the ten phase one Children's Centres shows that the Neighbourhood Nurseries, although not mentioned explicitly were central to the new developments where it seems that in some cases nursery schools that had developed Neighbourhood Nurseries were to become Children's Centres (Mid City Council

2005) . By the time interviews were carried out the city had 18 Children's Centres; in addition to the ten phase one, there were six phase two and two phase three.

At a local authority level the Children's Centre development did appear to reflect the government aim of "...rationalising a wide range of existing community-based initiatives" (DfES 2002a p.38). Overwhelmingly, however, managers of the Children's Centres saw the development as being explicitly linked to the success or weaknesses of the Sure Start Local Programmes with the Early Excellence Centre and Neighbourhood Nurseries rarely being mentioned. Some saw the ground work of the Local Programmes as being valued and rolled out:

I think central government thought that Sure Start was a really good thing, the EPPE research sort of pointed to that and I think they wanted to expand it (Children's Centre Manager).

My personal view was that the government set up the Local Programmes, saw that they were working and thought we need to do more of this, we need it for everyone (Children's Centre Manager).

Even those who had been critical of the Local Programmes especially in their perceived lack of focus saw the ideas or concept that the Local Programmes represented, as being successful, and the Children's Centres as a way that the positive things were continued and the less positive things were discarded:

Obviously lots around that said Sure Start [Local Programmes] hadn't achieved compared to what it had had money wise but no one could argue against the model, the model was right but perhaps the way it had been rolled out, the framework for it wasn't... (Local Authority Officer).

My feeling was that the Local Programme embedded good practices around engagement and the Children's Centre roll out was about lets now be more targeted and measured (Children's Centre Manager).

Discussions of the success or weaknesses of the Local Programmes led to discussions of the role of the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) in the Children's Centre development. Many respondents acknowledged the poor evaluation results but disregarded them as being flawed, there was a clear understanding from managers and local authority officers that the Local Programmes were a long term programme and results after such a short time were not to be taken seriously:

I remember at the time [of initial findings reports] thinking we've only just started to do certain things, hadn't got to the bottom of evaluating what we were doing, hadn't been running long enough to have any real findings (Children's Centre Manager).

The contradiction of the evaluation evidence and the lived experience and personal testimony of those working in and using the services was apparent here at local level in the same way that it was at national level. The two were not independent; it was this local experience that provided the feedback to central government through MPs that was so important in the continued commitment to the Children's Centre Programme at central level.

5.3.3 The Role of the Children's Centres

Although as highlighted earlier in the chapter, the policy framework of the Children's Centre Programme was set at national level the implementation of the programme was reliant on local interpretation. In Kingdon's (1995) terminology the policy stream was still fluid at local level and although the national framework provided boundaries the interaction of process and participants within the local policy stream determined the day to day implementation of the policy.

Children's Centres in Mid City were to "... raise standards, increase opportunity, support families, reduce social exclusion, address child poverty and improve the health of families living in [Mid City]" (Mid City Council 2004 p.6).

Managers were overwhelmingly positive about the Children's Centre Programme in general, and specifically, about the way that the Centres worked in the City.

Managers gave different descriptions of what the Children's Centres aims were with some highlighting issues of addressing poverty, some highlighting child development issues, others talking in more long term language about life chances and cycles of deprivation. The theme of a holistic service emerged and many who

had worked in other types of settings, within early years, highlighted the way in which the Children's Centres were different in their focus on the whole child. The universal nature of the Children's Centre services was also highlighted by many as fundamental to the work of the Centres and one of the key areas of improvement over the Sure Start Local Programmes.

As there was a general perception that the Children's Centres had grown out of the Local Programmes some of the discussion of the role and practice of the Children's Centres centred on the way that they differed from the local programmes. The focus on the child rather than the family was a theme that emerged from these discussions. Whilst many managers acknowledged the, sometimes conflicting, demands of balancing parents and children's needs they were very clear that the Children Centres were there to meet children's needs and improve outcomes for children and that this differed from the focus of the Local Programmes:

Local Programmes had a greater focus on adults, looked at the whole family, not that we don't do that now but the Children's Centre has a much clearer focus on the child. I have to think about this as it is easy to get bombarded by the parent's story and issues but we mustn't lose sight of the child... It is coming back to keeping the child at the centre – I don't remember having that same conviction and passion about the child being central in the Local Programmes. There, it was much more about the

family – all of the events were about the parents and what they needed and the family as a whole (Children's Centre Manager).

Those from an early years or education background found this more defined focus on the child and their outcomes both logical and obvious, but those involved in the Local Programmes highlighted it as a significant change in expectations. They highlighted that the original managers of the Local Programmes were recruited based on their community development experience, however, when the Children's Centre was rolled out, the managerial requirements changed. The requirement to have childcare on site was raised as a particular difficulty by those who had been recruited because of their community development background and experience:

When we became Children's Centres, the phase one having to have childcare that required... the spec was changed about who managed them. The local authority wanted to have someone who had an early years or education background to be considered to run them, that wasn't considered at all before (Children's Centre Manager).

This change in focus highlights the significance of the individual in the development of the programme. As will be shown in the section on the influence of individuals, professional background or heritage is a key factor on the way that individuals understand and interact with the programme.

The main criticism of the Children's Centre Programme raised by many managers and local authority officers, was linked to the extremely wide remit of the Centres and this was seen as being driven by central government. The conception of the Sure Start aims, developed after the Inter-departmental review in 2002, moved 'Sure Start' from a programme to support children and parents in disadvantaged areas to a programme that would provide:

- Better outcomes for all **children**, and particularly, closing the gap in outcomes between children living in poverty and the wider child population;
- Better outcomes for all **parents**, increased opportunity to effectively participate in the labour market, ensuring pathways out of poverty and strengthened families and communities;
- Better outcomes for **communities**, including less crime, higher productivity, a stronger labour market and the building of a civic society (DfES 2003b pp.6-7)

Although none of those interviewed mentioned the 'Sure Start aims' or 'principles' those working in the Children's Centres acknowledged that it was important to engage with all aspects of children's lives; the child, their families and their communities. There was some concern that some aspects of the programme, for example moving parents into work, were initially outside of workers skill sets. There was the feeling that Children's Centres were being judged on many targets

that were beyond their control. All managers felt it was justified to measure targets and where they were able to control or impact on the outcome they were happy that this was fair, but there was a strong feeling that it was unrealistic to link all child outcomes to the impact of the Children's Centres:

Children's Centres are told they have to target things that are other people's targets. Lots of health targets especially around ante natal targets and ante natal smoking especially, but we get to parents at the later stages of their pregnancy, we are focusing on engaging them so we can encourage breast feeding but then we are told we have to target smoking but that is a midwifery target so sometimes there is a tendency to put anything that has a child in it under the Children Centre remit (Children's Centre Manager).

...one is an EYFS target and I don't know why that is one of our targets ...even if we do a fantastic job with the child up to 3 what happens between 3 and when they finish reception could scupper everything that you've done...but we are judged by those targets and I don't know what the government want us to do to impact on those targets (Children's Centre Manager).

These frustrations were compounded in areas where partnership working required to meet the targets was not happening due to difficulties in the partner organisation. Partnership working was emphasised by both central and local authority guidance documentation as being essential in the programme. By this time joined up working at central and local level was a key part of the policy stream, any policies that emphasised this type of structure were much more likely to be coupled with the political stream (Powell and Glendenning 2002). The model of partnership working, developed for the Children's Centres, was seen by the majority interviewed as preferable to the model used in the Local Programmes where it was perceived that the Local Programmes simply bought services in which didn't really require any partnership just plenty of funding. In Mid City links were made between key partners at the planning and development stage but the translation of this commitment into practice was mixed across the city.

The key partners that were identified by managers were education, health, adult education, job centre plus and social services. Generally relationships with schools were identified as good and many of the Children's Centres were on school or nursery school sites. Where Centres were on school sites they generally had a separate entrance although in some cases they shared a gate onto the site with the school. In nursery schools this distinction was less pronounced. Managers discussed good levels of support from the board of Governors and there were no comments about the relationship with the school being difficult or conflicting. Centres that were not on school sites still worked with the schools in their local area and in general these relationships were also good. It was apparent that these

good relationships depended to some extent on the individuals involved as there were some stories of previous head teachers who were not so committed to the partnership approach which meant that services were not as joined up as they could have been.

Links with health, adult education and jobcentre plus were extremely varied and depended on staffing and funding issues in the partner organisation. Relationships with health services were the ones that saw the most variety between the Children's Centres with some stating that they had very good, stable relationships with the Health Visitor service and others stating that they had little or no relationship. The reasons for this level of diversity were highlighted as being down to issues in the Health Visitor service; staffing, long term sickness, organisational issues and also about locality to other services. Where Health Visitors were attached to GP services which were nearby there was little point in moving, in cases where Children's Centres covered a large area there were issues about the amount of Health Visitors in the area. There was also some discussion of the way that professional boundaries were being crossed or the perception of this as some talked of Health Visitors feeling like the Children's Centres were taking over some of their roles:

In [Mid City] when they set up [Children's Centres] Health Visitors thought that they were taking their work from them so it didn't start on a good footing with Health Visitors. So when the Children's Centres... and ours ... was one of the first to be designated it was

a big job for me to nurture our health professionals to say this is what we are doing and we can't do it without you we're not taking anything from you but we want to compliment you and support you (Children's Centre Manager).

Although work activation was a central part of the new Children's Centre vision, the majority of centres had never had a consistent input from jobcentre plus, with some only having a direct phone number for an individual at the local office. This was not seen as problematic by managers who felt that they were able to support the parents who needed support in this area as the vast majority were only at the 'getting ready for work' stage. Cuts in funding and services in the adult education service were identified as being more problematic and responsible for a lack of suitable courses for parents:

We work with adult ed. who put the courses on; we consult with parents we request the course from adult ed. and they put it on and we offer the crèche. Before we would do any course, nail art, beauty, first aid, food hygiene, but tracking the parents is the hard part. It's not about them doing the course it's about tracking what impact that has. What parents want isn't really in line with what the local authority want. We are now doing an employability skills course but I have to pay for that as adult ed. don't do it. But now

I have to go back to those people and ask what has happened to them. And there are no jobs (Children's Centre Manager).

Links with Social Services were also varied but depended on the needs of the local areas and the managers' own perception of the type of relationship that they should have with the statutory service. In some areas of the city child protection issues were extremely common and formed the basis of Children's Centre targets, here links with social services were seen as necessary to provide continuity in families' lives. In other areas priorities were linked to unemployment and education where Social Services had less importance. A theme that did come through consistently was that managers were very clear in their desire to be seen as separate from Social Services, this was seen as essential to be able to gain and maintain the trust of local parents:

...yes we have some intense cases where we have assisted in children being removed but we still manage to work with families as they don't see us as a threat and we are not social services. So we might make the referral we can still be open and honest and say we can work with you and support you in getting your children back. My fear is if we are pushed more and more down social services heading we will be associated with social workers (Children's Centre Manager).

A number of managers who had worked in the local authority for many years, specifically mentioned Family Centres as an example of what they saw as an apparently neutral service quickly became stigmatised and unpopular through their association with Social Services. Much like the influence of feedback that Kingdon describes in the national policy stream, the knowledge of and feedback from this previous initiative at local level was used to shape the current policy and to justify keeping the universal, independent nature of the Children's Centres.

There was also a worry that central government did not understand or take into account the local context in which Children's Centres were operating, this was discussed in terms of a range of targets from breast feeding to work preparation.

In terms of preparing for work, in theory it is a really good idea. My problem is that we are pushing people to be work ready, to get their qualifications, but Mid City is one of the worse hit areas for unemployment... so we are building them up and then there won't be a job (Children's Centre Manager).

Overall then although the move to Children's Centres was portrayed at central level as a relatively simple merging of a range of pilot programmes this was complicated at local level by problems of partnership working and changes in focus. In addition, although local context was highlighted in national documents as being of central importance in shaping implementation, the needs of the government sometimes conflicted with the needs of the local.

5.4 Significant Contributory Factors

It was important for the case study, to understand the significance of different elements in the policy implementation process. It has been shown in previous chapters that different elements of Kingdon's (1995) streams framework are more or less significant in different parts of the policy process. In the case of the Children's Centre Programme it has also been highlighted that the political stream is influential in previous aspects of the process. In the course of researching the case study a number of factors became apparent that were significant in understanding the way that the Children's Centre Programme developed in Mid City and why the development was seen as successful. These factors were linked to: the influence of central ideology, the ethos and heritage of the city and local authority, and the influence of individuals at the local authority and front line level. Using Kingdon's (1995) model and terminology political elements at both central and local levels are pivotal in understanding the way that the policy was implemented but alongside this there are important interactions between process and participants which also shaped the implementation.

5.4.1 The influence of Ideology at the Implementation Stage – The National

Political Stream

Third way ideology, crucial to developments at central level, also had an impact on local implementation. Ideologically driven decisions about the way policy is implemented will shape the context in which front line workers operate and implement policy. The introduction of managerialism and New Public Management during the 1980s and 90s had been an attempt to move towards a market driven

approach in public services and was in direct opposition to the hierarchical, bureaucratic approach of the post war years (Smith et.al 2011, Prior and Barnes, 2011). Early in their first term the New Labour government attempted to put trust back into the public sector and empower front line workers by re-instating the discretion in policy implementation that they felt was needed to develop complex solutions to complex problems (Durose 2011). The Modernisation of Government white paper (1999) expressed a desire to allow public sector staff to be innovative and entrepreneurial within its four key principles of public sector reform;

1. High National standards and full accountability
2. Devolution to the local level to encourage diversity and creativity
3. Flexibility at the front line to support modern public services
4. The promotion of greater choice and alternative providers

(DfES 2003b p.9).

Points 2 and 3 are particularly important here as a key theme running through the guidance documents issued from central level in relation to the Children's Centre Programme is that the local authority must make decisions based on the services that they currently have in place and the needs of the communities that they serve. Although this approach changed through time with an increase in centralised monitoring and control, initially the government appeared happy to steer policy but pass more responsibility for appropriate implementation to front line workers and significantly to the communities involved (Durose 2011).

New Labour were committed to doing things differently and their ideas of joined up government were also important at local level where partnerships and collaboration were seen as the best way to achieve change (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002, Powell and Exworthy 2001, Bochel and Duncan 2007). Partnership working was seen as the 'third way' between bureaucracy and the market and the best way to provide joined up solutions at local level (Powell and Glendinning 2002). In reality however there was also a great deal of centralisation in some policy areas and Exworthy et.al (2002) suggest that silo mentality was entrenched and endured. These contradictions alongside the fast pace of change at local level meant that front line workers were often trying to balance new ways of working within old and entrenched structures:

...front-line workers are now charged with reconciling the emergent demands of governance – notably those of the communities they work within- with the remnants of earlier structures of local government (Durose 2011 p.979).

A significant part of the new approach to policy implementation was the emphasis on area based initiatives and local community empowerment (although in some policy areas and in some communities this was already taking place). Public services were expected to engage with, and work alongside the communities that they were serving (Prior and Barnes 2011). The ideological drive from central government to build the capacity of communities and work in partnership was rooted in their social investment approach, theories of communitarianism (Etzioni

1998, Putman 2000) and particularly in Giddens' structuration approach. This emphasis on community engagement means that the issue of context becomes even more central when looking at policy implementation (Terpstra and Havinga 2001).

The Sure Start Local Programmes that preceded the Children Centre set the precedent for expectations about the way that services would run, and gave a clear indication of the fact that New Labour were fully committed to the idea of collaborative working that involved the community in order to meet the communities' needs better (Wilson and Game 2006, Parry and Kerr 2007), they were innovative and ground breaking. Based around a core set of services those working in local programmes were encouraged to use their professional judgment and knowledge to implement this new and exceptionally well funded service. Managers were recruited on the basis of their community development credentials and it was highlighted in the case study evidence that there was an expectation that they would be creating services that could not be conceived of on a large local authority scale:

... mostly the managers were mavericks – they would make that leap into the dark. The people who followed us didn't have that about them. In order to be really creative that is what you need – those sorts of people (Former Local Programme Manager).

The other initiatives, Early Excellence Centres and Neighbourhood Nurseries, although developed at the same time, and having a level of community lead, were

run through the local authority and concentrated on a much more traditional area of work. The integrated nature of the work that both initiatives did was innovative as highlighted in earlier chapters but their structure and purpose was much clearer than the Local Programmes. Nonetheless front-line staff, within all three initiatives, were expected to adapt the services that they offered to meet the needs of the specific community that they served.

In fact, there is a suggestion that during this period the nature of central policy-making became much broader and deliberately messy in a conscious attempt to force local adaptation. In this case then the success of a policy may rely on practitioners' willingness or ability to use this vagueness to adapt and bend policy to local needs (Stoker 2004, Bergen 2005). This idea challenges both, theories on perfect policy implementation which specify that a clear outline of policy, transmitted exactly, are essential for the successful implementation of policy (Dorey 2005), and theories where front line workers are seen as subversive (Lipsky 1980). In contrast front line workers now operate in contexts where "...[they] have to interpret policy, work with communities and make choices about how to implement and deliver policy in a locally appropriate and mutually beneficial way" (Durose 2011 p.982). It is suggested then that new ways of thinking about the role of front line workers in policy implementation are needed (Prior and Barnes 2011, Durose 2011). This is not to say that the agency of front line workers is less important than when Lipsky wrote in the 1980s but that the context in which they exercise their agency and expectations of their role have changed. A wider range of actors are now involved, alongside front line workers, in interpreting and

implementing policy (Prior and Barnes 2011). These ideas will be further developed in the section on the importance of individuals.

5.4.2 The City and Local Authority - The Local Political Stream

On a practical level there were a number of issues raised about Mid City that managers and local authority officers saw as important. The most common points raised were about the size of the authority and the number of Children's Centres. It was felt that the city was small enough to retain cohesion within the programme. Those who had come from much larger neighbouring authorities commented on the fact that it was manageable to get to know the other Children's Centres and work as a group in a way that they had not been able to previously: "We have built relationships [within the management group] because we are small and close knit" (Children's Centre Manager).

From very early on in the Children's Centre Programme, managers attended monthly meetings with the head of service and these were highlighted by all as a positive thing that allowed some continuity between centres. The regular meetings gave the opportunity to share good practice and gain an understanding of developments in the service both locally and nationally. It also acted as a way for the Children's Centres to be seen as a coherent service:

The monthly meeting is very important and we react together, we have a group of managers who act on different issues and then come together. We are quite

collective we are not left to get on with it on our own
(Children's Centre Manager).

As highlighted earlier, the Children's Centre development was driven by the particular needs of the city, and a good deal of emphasis was put on areas being able to develop services that were suited to the needs of the local communities. Although this approach was also encouraged by the national guidance, interviews supported the point that the local authority was driven by a local agenda. A number of the managers talked about the independence they felt they had in shaping their own Children's Centre, this was seen as something that was either encouraged or enabled by the local authority. This autonomy to meet the needs of their own community, was highly valued and seen as central to the work that the Children's Centres do, all managers were aware of the specific needs of their own communities and how these differed from neighbouring areas. There was clear agreement that the Children's Centres were still community focused:

... so you have a clear vision of what the Children's Centre should be but you still have the ability to adapt to the community you have" (Children's Centre Manager).

I...welcome the autonomy, that this centre can have its own vibe, all centres are different they are not clones of each other at all... the balance of services that may be right here wouldn't necessarily translate

to other Children's Centres. I'm not trying to be like
other Children's Centres (Children's Centre Manager).

This idea was supported by local authority officers who valued the move to more standardisation brought by the Children's Centres, but highlighted that the independence and individual nature of the Children's Centres was an active decision: "As a local authority they allowed them to develop to meet the needs of the local area and that was a conscious decision. Each one was a unique entity" (Local Authority Officer).

When the delivery of the Children's Centre Programme, as part of the 'new Sure Start services' was to be managed by the local authority, much academic and political debate centred around the way that this would lead to: a lack of innovation, reduction in managers ability to use their own discretion, and more standardisation, all of which were seen as being disadvantageous to communities (Lewis 2011, Glass 2006, Bagley 2011). However the local case study challenges some of these points. Whilst acknowledging that the Children's Centre Programme marked a move towards a more standardised approach, in the case study in question, the level of standardisation was initially limited. In recent years however, the level of standardisation of systems has increased. This was highlighted by a number of managers as being very welcome as now parents know what to expect when they go to different Children's Centres so they feel comfortable with policies and procedures. Some standardisation was also welcomed in terms of data collection where the local authority has to make returns of outcomes for all Children's Centres in the city.

A new data base was established to ensure that data was comparable across centres. Local authority officers, and a number of managers, were keen to point out that this did not lead to a standardised set of services to families. Managers were still able to fit the services that they provided into the outcomes data base to ensure that services were valued for what they did in their particular area, and allowed them to meet the targets that they had set in their own areas as a Local Authority officer explained:

What we have now is a system where everyone fits in to the same system. There is still the scope for what it is... for example baby massage , some centres deemed it as an activity that improved the health of the baby some centres deem it as an attachment and post natal depression activity. We said that was fine as it meant centres could still localise. If their targets are around health then they use it for health but they still have to justify it in those terms; outcomes. We still have the flexibility of centres deciding how they want each activity to be classified.

It was clear from these conversations that managers were using their professional discretion to provide services for the needs of their own areas however none felt that they were subverting the system, they were all very clear that this is what the local authority expected them to do.

One of the most powerful themes that came out of this part of the research was the overwhelming feeling that the local authority was supportive of the Children's Centre Programme. This was shown to be important in the previous chapter when those working at regional and national level highlighted that 'buy in' from the local authority was essential for a successful roll out of the programme. Documentation linked to the development of the Children's Centres and the initiatives that preceded them, all highlighted the opportunities that the government initiatives provided for the city. The Mid City Sure Start scrutiny review, carried out during 2005, also emphasised the clear commitment to the value of the existing programmes and the importance the city council placed on an efficient roll out of the Children's Centres:

Sure Start has deservedly built a strong reputation within the city. The development of innovative approaches to engaging families and strengthening the support available to children and families has been successful in the areas where the Programmes have been developed. The challenge that lies ahead is in ensuring the transition to the Children's Centres does not lead to a dilution of those services and innovation whilst ensuring that eventually all families in [Mid City] have the opportunity to access such facilities (Mid City Council 2006 p.4).

As discussed in the methods chapter it is difficult to gauge ethos or feelings from documents, but the enthusiasm and commitment that appears to show in the documentation was also supported by discussions with local officers and managers. There was a consensus in the support that the Children's Centres had from the local authority, but there were a number of reasons put forward to explain why this might be the case.

Some of those interviewed made links to the City's historic support of early years:

My experience in Mid City is they have always prioritised early years... so they had teachers in nurseries way before they had to, other authorities didn't prioritise in the same way (Children's Centre Manager).

I think that we have been extremely fortunate in Mid City that we have a council that fully supports our Children's Centres (Children's Centre Manager).

Others took this further and linked it to a wider commitment to local communities in the city:

...the underlying commitment was to community, we have had very strong community leaders, very strong community partnerships. Very early on we had community centres whose titles were vested in local communities (Local Authority Officer).

There were some comments that referred to a feeling of being protected by the local authority in the face of change and upheaval, and this was directly related to the perceived support for early years present in the authority. Although not directly connected to the time period being studied there were discussions of, and comparisons to, other local authorities where Children's Centres had recently been closed or services significantly reduced; this had not happened in Mid City at the time of the interviews. Where cuts in budget had been applied in the city this was seen as being driven by national government and not the local authority, there was a confidence that early years was valued and would be protected.

The case study evidence suggested that the local authority were crucial in shaping the Children's Centre Programme. The overall approach of the local authority in terms of the problem and policy was, it would seem, already in line with the problem and policy streams developed at central level. The decision made to move to the Children's Centre model in one go from 2006 was significant and showed a commitment to providing coherent early years services as well as a confidence in the authority's ability to plan and implement the complex new programme. In Mid City at least it would seem that the problem, policy and political streams coupled at local level.

5.5 The Importance of Individuals

The other significant theme that emerged from the case study was the importance of individuals both at local authority and Children's Centre level. The Lead for Children's Centres had been with the authority since 1999 and initially worked as Early Years Partnership Co-ordinator. Although not involved in the Sure Start Local

Programmes she had been active in developing the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative and was personally very committed to joined up services. She was identified early on as the Lead for the Children's Centre Programme and the continuity provided by having the same person being responsible for developing the city wide plan (in partnership), managing the roll out of the programme and continuing to manage it six years after roll out is significant. Connected to this was the approach of the individual and her personal commitment to improving early years services. All managers agreed that the Head of Service, individually, was hugely significant in the way that the programme worked:

Very much about [Head of Service], she was very passionate about Children's Centres, very passionate about early years; she fought for what we stood for (Children's Centre Manager).

In addition others felt that the influence of individual officers and elected members was central:

I think a lot of it is that [Head of Service] had a very collegiate approach to everything and was very good at partnership...[and] I think that we did do well in terms of political sign up...Local Programmes in Mid City were very politically driven (Local Authority Officer).

...here our local councillors are heavily involved, on the board of Governors and advisory board; we can actively get them involved with families (Children's Centre Manager).

This high level of engagement, of individuals at local authority level, was raised by those interviewed working at national and regional level and by prominent figures in the Children's Centre field (House of Commons 2010). It was highlighted that if those with influence, either local authority officers or local councillors had a clear understanding and commitment to the programme, the roll out was much smoother and successful.

The role of individual centre managers was also seen as significant in the development of individual centres. Managers were asked whether centres were driven by managers, the local authority or national policy, overwhelmingly, managers expressed a strong belief that individuals shaped the Children's Centres. However, they did this within the guidelines of the local authority and, importantly, this model was expected by the local authority. The 2006 Scrutiny report supports this idea and highlights the importance of the "...manager ...being flexible in approach in terms of addressing local needs".

The centrality of individuals meant that managers were directly linked to the perceived effectiveness of individual centres rather than central government policy or local authority direction:

... two centres that are very different even though the area is similar, geographically next door, but the leadership has created two very different centres with very different levels of effectiveness. A centre is only as successful as its leader, services will carry on despite a bad leader but without a vision it will never be successful (Children's Centre Manager).

I think it is the same for all the centres, where you see, what I would consider, a weaker manager or leader then you can see that there isn't the drive forward (Children's Centre Manager).

The participants' links to Mid City are important to highlight in this section as overwhelmingly, participants have strong links to the city. Many live in the city and have worked their whole careers in Mid City while others have worked in Mid City and the surrounding local authorities. Many people saw this as positive due to the ability to build relationships and support a good knowledge of the area, although a couple of people raised issues around the potential for stagnation and a resistance to change.

The issue of professional heritage was raised explicitly by a number of respondents and implicitly by others. The nature of the Children's Centre with a broad remit of working with children, parents and the wider community, combined with the fact that the programme was made up from Local Programmes, Early Excellence Centres and Neighbourhood Nurseries meant that Children's Centre managers came from a

range of backgrounds and with a range of experiences. In Mid City, half of those interviewed identified themselves as having an early years background, although this category itself had a variety of experiences attached to it while the other half had education, community, social work or didn't feel that they could classify their background in one specific area. It was acknowledged by many managers that their professional heritage influenced their Children's Centre. The examples given to support this idea were very varied, with some highlighting a general ethos of holistic understandings of the child linked to early years while others identified very specific feelings about how things should or shouldn't be done based on their previous professional experience in social services or other statutory services:

... I'm all for the preventative element of work and because of my ... background; everyone in the centre is from different backgrounds but I have put across my ethos of treating every family as individuals, understanding their world and that one size won't fit all, no two families are the same. It's about looking at the individual circumstances and not about going in with a menu and ticking a box and saying you've got to do this as its all I've got (Children's Centre Manager).

I think I run this centre according to the values that I have and the values I have shared and tried to nurture in my senior management team (Children's Centre Manager).

It was highlighted in the theoretical framework chapter that in light of new governance arrangements there was a need to revisit established understandings of the role of individual agency in the policy implementation process, with some suggesting, not that Lipsky's work is no longer relevant, but that it can be looked at in a wider sense as the sphere of individuals' influencing front line policy implementation expands (Durose 2011). Using Kingdon's (1995) model at local level can be useful in this re-thinking as there is certainly an overlap between Kingdon's policy entrepreneurs and Lipsky's (1980) street level bureaucrats. The case study has shown that it is not just those few who are actively pushing for the development of a policy that are influential. Kingdon's (1995) wider discussion of participants within the problem, policy and political streams show that the interplay of a whole range of individuals who may be active or passive in their support of the development of policy, are important in understanding the particular nature of policy development.

5.6 Conclusion

The roll out of the Children's Centre Programme in Mid City fitted well with government expectations that it would be viewed as a continuation of the Local Programmes, but would actually be a merging of a range of initiatives into a mainstream programme. Some of the difficulties at national level over conflicting programmes were visible early on but once the Children's Centre Programme in Mid City was agreed, the local authority direction and organisation seems to have resulted in a coherent city wide programme.

Unlike other recent research (Lewis 2011, Lewis, Cuthbert and Sarre 2011, Lewis, Roberts and Finnegan 2011, Lewis Finnegan and West 2011 and Bagley 2011) the overwhelming feeling in Mid City was that the Children's Centre Programme was a good development and an improvement on the Local Programmes. Clearly there are many reasons why studies of different areas may result in different opinions (some of these have been discussed more fully in the methods chapter), but the use of Kingdon's (1995) model is helpful in exploring and understanding the way that the range of process and participant (structure and agency) factors interact within the political and policy streams at local level. The transmission of national ideas from central to a range of local government structures follows a fairly standard process however local authorities themselves are anything but standard. Each one will be shaped by a range of cultural, historical and situational factors, further complexity will be added by agential factors of those working within the authority and it is this combination that will make them unique (Wilson and Game 2006). The importance of engagement at local authority level and the emphasis that was placed on the programmes, collectively and through individual officers and elected members, was raised time and again as being crucial to the coherence and confidence that managers felt in the programme.

At Children's Centre manager level, the idea that it was the manager's role / job to make the policy fit the local area was expected and embedded. The independent nature of each Children's Centre was highly valued. The influence of individuals was also a regular theme in the local interviews, as it was with those at national and

regional level with a feeling that policy was only as effective as the manager of the centre.

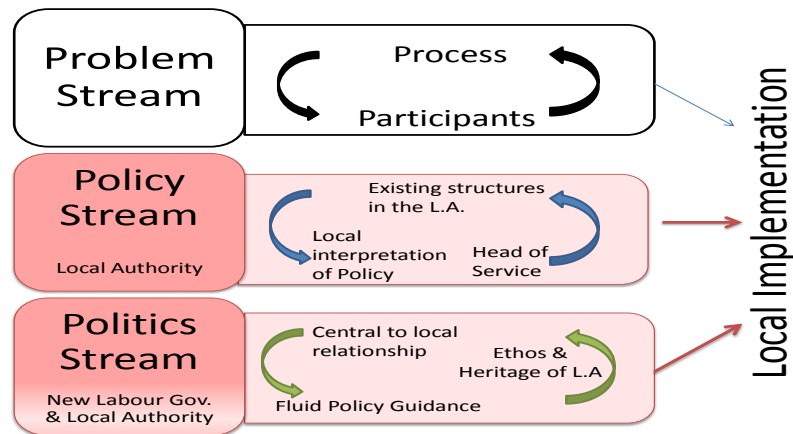
It was clear from the case study that the transmission of policy from central to local government was not simple. What was seen as the coming together of a number of connected programmes was transmitted as a continuation of one particular programme with the reframing of the programme into a set of aims and principles. The transmission of this shift in ideas was then very significant. Documents that came through to the local authorities at the time were not completely clear with the message, especially in terms of the Local Programmes, being somewhat confused. However front line managers were clear on their perception of the message; the Children's Centres were a continuation of the Local Programmes either due to the success of the Local Programme work or as a way of improving on the Local Programmes. The case study appears to show then that the local authority were central in the way that the message was put across. Comments made by those at regional and strategic levels, as well as comments made by managers who had been working in other authorities during the change over period, confirm that the message from the local authority was essential in setting the frame for the Children's Centre roll out.

The broadness of the guidance documents also suggested that central government wanted local authorities to manage the change in line with their own community needs. As the Children's Centre was framed as a continuation of previous programmes and as those programmes had been developed differently in each

local authority there were very practical reasons why this had to be the case however, the ideological push to de-centralise was also significant.

In addition the local authority used for this study was identified by many as having a firm commitment to early years, all managers who had a long employment history with the City highlighted examples where the City had developed early years services over and above the minimum required. Even those who were relatively new to the area could identify the city as being more committed to early years than other authorities that they had worked within. It was also highlighted in documentation related to the Children's Centre Programme that the city was already fully engaged with the partnership working that was required by the Children's Centres, due to the involvement in a range of other government initiatives aimed at reducing disadvantage.

This chapter has addressed the third research aim: *to analyse the role of context in understandings of the development of the Children's Centre Programme at local level* and in doing so has shown how Kingdon's (1995) model can be extended and applied to the implementation stage of the policy-making process. Extending Kingdon's (1995) model fig. 5.1 shows the dominant elements in the local implementation of the Children's Centre Programme. Elements of the central and local political streams along with the contribution of significant individuals were dominant in shaping implementation.



(Fig. 5.1 Prominent Elements in the Local Implementation Phase in the Case of the Children's Centre Programme)

For Kingdon (1995), this coupling would then lead to an opening of a window of opportunity which allowed the policy to develop, however in the case study in question this does not fully explain the implementation process as the Children's Centre Programme was centrally directed. Even if the streams did not couple in the way described, the programme would still develop. Local authorities were required to develop the specified programme. The coupling of the streams influenced the nature of the development, the coherence of the whole programme, perhaps even the success, or perceived success of the programme as a whole. In understanding the interaction of the streams the model helps in understanding the context specific nature of the implementation. The importance of extending Kingdon's (1995) model to the implementation stage will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Synthesis and Further Reflections

6.1 Introduction

In describing the methodological approach to this thesis, it was stated in chapter one that the research would be broadly in line with adaptive theory (Layder 1998), which advocates using theory to shape research but to also generate theory from research. The previous three chapters have shown how Kingdon's (1995) streams model of agenda setting can be used as a framework to analyse the development of the Children's Centre Programme at central and local levels. Using theory to shape research, the thesis has shown how the model enhances understanding of the policy-making and implementation process and allows structural, agential, planned and random events and actions to be considered within one framework. The complex interaction of structure and agency will be discussed in more detail in the first section of this chapter.

At the same time as showing the importance of Kingdon's model in understanding the Children's Centre Programme, the previous chapters have also extended Kingdon's model in a number of ways, generating theory from research. First the case study has shown how Kingdon's (1995) model can be extended to facilitate an understanding of the implementation phase of the policy process, secondly how it can be used to explain and analyse continuity as well as change and finally how the political stream of Kingdon's model, in UK policy, is dominant and shapes the other

streams to a greater extent than Kingdon's original model suggested. These debates will form the basis of the second half of this chapter.

6.2 Issues of Structure and Agency

Structure and agency debates have featured heavily in the preceding chapters. In terms of the public policy literature, debates around the policy process can be broadly categorised in terms of the perceived influence of either structural or agential factors (Cairney 2012), as although it is acknowledged that both structure and agency are relevant, many theories focus on one or other as being dominant (Ayres and Marsh 2013). In the specific case of the Children's Centre Programme structure and agency debates are significant at all three levels of the policy process analysed. Debates around the causes of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty draw almost exclusively on theories that explain the problem through either individual or structural factors (Deacon 2003). When considering policy solutions to the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty, Giddens' ideas of structuration, where individuals adapt their behaviour to the wider situations that they find themselves in, were central to the New Labour approach. At the implementation phase the key issues of significance were the heritage of Mid City, the Children's Centre Managers and local authority officers and the way that the interplay between these elements shaped the implementation process. The use of Kingdon's model provided a framework that allows for fluidity between structural and agential influences and it is this aspect of the model and the case study that will be explored more fully in this section.

Of central importance in the development of the Children's Centre Programme at central level were process elements of Kingdon's (1995) streams: Giddens' notion of structuration was, initially perhaps, the most important idea in the New Labour mission to address inequalities in society. By addressing the big structural barriers that individuals faced, the government were in a strong position to alter some of the entrenched problems that they identified as being at the heart of disadvantage. In the attempt to address the specific problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and later child poverty the ideas of social investment, early intervention and the importance of parental access to the labour market were key drivers. Addressing the big issues would then allow or encourage individuals to alter their own actions and take advantage of the opportunities created. The case study has shown the importance of these process factors and the structural changes that they created but it has also highlighted the way that individuals were also very important in the policy process.

At central level individuals interpreted and used ideas to drive and adapt policy. The understanding of what terms like 'social investment' and 'early intervention' meant were fairly broad and the ideas about the way that these concepts could be translated into policy were connected to the interpretation of individual ministers and civil servants, in Kingdon's (1995) terms these individuals can be seen as policy entrepreneurs. It was highlighted in chapter four that the government made a decision to involve those in the early years field in discussions and decisions in the policy field, including bringing them into the policy-making process as civil servants and policy advisors. Two of the individuals interviewed for this thesis were brought into government in this way and had previously been strong advocates of change in

the early years field. Both were willing to invest a great deal of time and energy into promoting the early years as a focus for government activity, they clearly fit the role of policy entrepreneurs.

The ministers involved in the Children's Centre Programme were not, however, necessarily moved into and out of the appropriate departments because of their championing of or personal commitment to the Children's Centre Programme. The nature of ministers' position in central government will mean that they are unlikely to be able to focus on any one specific area of policy in isolation or for any length of time. Any understanding that they bring to a policy area is likely to go beyond the individual policy and include wider contextual issues connected with other elements of the political stream. They will bring with them knowledge of other related policy areas, the wider government agenda and pressures from their own constituency. This means that within the wider structures of government bureaucracy and influential ideas, individual interpretation of ideas and the wider context become an important factor in the specific way that policy develops.

It was raised in the interview with the former minister that some of the ministers given responsibility for the Sure Start Unit between 1997 and 2006 were not necessarily committed to the 'original' ideas behind the programmes. Based on her previous professional actions and her comments during the interview the former minister who took part in this study, could certainly be seen as a policy entrepreneur in Kingdon's (1995) terms however as highlighted in chapter four she was moved from the early years field before she was able to fully implement her ideas and replaced by others who had less personal commitment to the early years

field or the Sure Start principles. Instead of seeing ministers as policy entrepreneurs; "...advocates who are willing to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, money – to promote a position in return for anticipated future gain...(Kingdon 1995 p.179), many of the ministers involved, at different points, in the Sure Start programmes could just as easily be seen as individuals who were "...engaged in making operational decisions according to their interpretation of the particular situation they were faced with; such interpretations being influenced by their personal and professional values and motivations..." (Durose 2011 p.266); a version of Lipsky's Street Level Bureaucrats operating at central level.

At local level it is by now accepted that individual agency plays a significant part in the implementation of policy; Lipsky's work in the 1980s broke with conventional academic discussion on policy implementation and opened the field of implementation studies to a range of research identifying the importance of discretion at the front line of service delivery (Durose 2011). The case study of Mid City adds to this body of knowledge and shows the significance of individual Children's Centre managers and local authority officers in shaping the specific nature of the implementation of the programme. Managers highlighted how their own professional background, knowledge of the city and catchment area and personal beliefs about working with children and families, shaped the way that they developed and ran the Children's Centre. Managers also highlighted how the personal and professional qualities of the local authority officers supported them in their approach. All of these individual influences can be seen as central to the way that the Children's Centre Programme developed in Mid City. Interestingly many

of these individuals, although fitting the definition of Lipsky's street level bureaucrats, can also be described, perhaps more accurately, as local policy entrepreneurs. All of those interviewed discussed their longstanding commitment to the field of early years and to the ideas of early intervention in one form or another.

Individual influence at the implementation stage is now generally accepted as being important; what is less discussed within implementation studies is the way in which structures impact on those working at front line level (Terpstra and Havinga 2001). Structures are often seen as constraining however in Mid City a range of structural factors can be seen as (and some were identified as) being enabling. In terms of the wider programme the changes made as a result of the modernising government paper (The Cabinet Office 1999) meant that Local Authorities were expected to shape the Children's Centre Programme to best fit their particular circumstances taking into account the existing services that were in place. This aspect of central structure is particularly important as it meant that local structural factors became driving factors in the development. It was shown in chapter five that Mid City took a specific approach to the development of Children's Centres and although the actual decision to take this approach was made by individuals the decision was perceived as being heavily influenced by the heritage of the local authority. As highlighted by Zahariadis " [c]ollective choices are not merely the derivatives of individual efforts aggregated in some fashion but rather the combined results of structural forces and cognitive processes that are highly context dependent" (2003 p.2). The heritage of Mid City, especially in terms of its historic commitment to early

years and to community led policy enabled and shaped the implementation process in two ways. First it is likely that those working in the authority were drawn to it because of its commitments and a number of managers referred to this explicitly and others implicitly. This meant that policy entrepreneurs in this field were already involved in the authority or were drawn to it. Secondly the infrastructure of early intervention and community based working was already in place and used to develop the Children's Centre Programme. The structural factors of the local authority enabled and encouraged the individual action that led to the programme developing in the way that it did.

At central and local level then an understanding of structure and agency are essential in providing a full picture of the development. Focusing exclusively on either one or the other will only ever provide a partial picture of the development and as the case study has shown in previous chapters it is not even enough to consider both sets of factors alongside each other. Structural and agential factors are inter-twined each impacting and being impacted by the other. Using Kingdon's(1995) model allows the two sets of factors to be considered together and allows for an acknowledgement that the interaction between structure and agency remains fluid. At the same time studying the development of the Children's Centre Programme at central and local levels allows an understanding of the similarities in structure agency relationships at the policy-making and policy implementation stages. Applying Kingdon's (1995) model to both stages allows a clearer understanding of this similarity.

The first part of this chapter has shown how important it is to attempt to understand the complex interaction of agency and structure at both central and local levels and how rather than seeing them as two separate areas of study there is in fact a good deal of overlap between them. The second part of the chapter will show how useful the case study of the Children's Centre Programme has been in further developing Kingdon's model; in extending the model to the implementation phase of the policy-making process, examining how the model can be used to explore elements of continuity as well as change and in an understanding of the dominant role of the political stream in this area of policy-making.

6.3 Extending Kingdon's Model to the Implementation Phase

The case study of the Children's Centre reported here shows clearly that Kingdon's (1995) model can be extended and used to explore policy implementation. The number of examples of this type of extension of the model is limited with only two based in the UK and none in the area of early years (Exworthy et.al 2002, Exworthy and Powell 2004, Mannheimer et.al 2007, Ridde 2009). The case study of the local implementation of the Children's Centre Programme has identified that Kingdon's streams of problem, policy and politics continue to be significant at local level although the individual elements that are most significant may vary from those that are important at central level. Chapter five and the previous section showed that within Mid City the heritage of the local authority (local political stream), in the shape of its commitment to community led initiatives and early years, was a key driver in the way that policy was enacted. Alongside this were the individuals; Children's Centre managers and the local authority officers who acted as policy

entrepreneurs driving forward a coherent version of the Programme. Other research into the development of the Children's Centre Programme has shown that in some local authorities the programme was less coherent and the transition of moving to Children's Centres from a variety of pilot programmes proved problematic (Lewis 2011, Lewis, Cuthbert and Sarre 2011, Lewis, Roberts and Finnegan 2011, Lewis, Finnegan and West 2011, Bagley 2011). The Children's Centre Programme is not the only example of differences in implementation, Wilson and Game (2006) are clear that each local authority is unique, consisting of a range of cultural, historical and situational factors and in fact the subject of implementation studies grew out of the desire to gain an understanding of why the implementation of policy was not always as imagined when the policy was developed. At a simplistic level it is easy to suggest that the way policy becomes implemented in each local authority is unpredictable and random, based on a wide range of variables, however using Kingdon's (1995) model provides a framework to understand this apparently random process and in doing this adds a finer grain element to explanations of similarity and difference in implementation.

In the case study reported here the problem and policy streams described by Kingdon (1995) had already been broadly framed at central level; the local authority was required to implement the programme of Children's Centres and by default accept the government's construction of the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and appropriate policy solutions. Nonetheless the transmission of information between central and local government was fluid and flexible which ensured that it was the local authority themselves who framed the programme at local level. In Mid City

key decisions were made to bring all three pilot programmes together in one go, in addition the decision was made to link many of the new Children's Centres to schools and to operate the Centres in a collective and collegiate way while retaining their independence. These decisions were raised by many of those interviewed as being significant in the coherent programme that emerged. It was shown in the previous chapter that these decisions were perceived to be a combination of the personal ideology of individuals and the collective ideology and ethos of the local authority but it would be misleading to separate the two things too rigidly. There is no doubt that individuals working in the authority were aware of and in some cases drawn to work in the authority because its approach fitted with their own ideas. Even though the local authority had no say about implementing the Children's Centre Programme they did have a lot of influence in deciding how the programme would work and it is here that the local political stream proved pivotal. Accepting this can, then, help in understanding difference as well as continuity in implementation. Provided with the right framework (as local authorities were under New Labour), elements in the local political stream will shape local implementation.

This point brings the thesis back to the third research aim, *to analyse the role of context in understanding the development of the Children's Centre Programme at the local level*. The individual context of policy implementation is central in exploring process but this does not mean that it cannot be understood in a structured way. Kingdon's (1995) model provides a framework and structure to

understand the interplay of elements that make up the context and this model is as relevant at local level as it is at central.

One of the implications of this type of context driven implementation is that it can point to ways that Kingdon's (1995) model can be used in a predictive way. One of the criticisms of Kingdon's approach is that the fluidity of process and individual factors and the acceptance that policy works in different ways in different policy contexts means that the model does not help in predicting policy change. The concept of 'the time was right' as a driver for policy development does not provide enough structure to predict when the time might be right for other policy developments (Mucciaroni 1992, Robinson and Eller 2010). The case presented here provides some challenge to these criticisms as studying the development of the Children's Centre Programme at local authority level has shown that the interplay between structures and individuals within the local authority does show some consistency which could prove useful in understanding the way that subsequent policy may develop.

It was highlighted in the methodology chapter that Mid City was not chosen due to its significant difference or similarity to other local authorities and so there is no suggestion that findings reported in this case study can be directly applied to other local authority areas. The case study did show, however, that some of the significant elements that contributed to the way the Children's Centre Programme was rolled out were not new. The heritage of the local authority in its response to children's services and community based projects and the type of staff it attracted; staff also committed to forward thinking approaches to children and families, many

of whom had been working in the authority for many years, was highlighted in many of the interviews and documents used in the case study as being an integral part of the local authority. In addition Mid City had been Labour controlled for the majority of the last 30 years and was not expected to change significantly in the future suggesting that first, elected councillors were more likely to be supportive of Labour government led initiatives and ideas, and second, that there was a level of consistency in the local political framework (local political stream). It could be suggested then that the overall policy context (in terms of policy for children and families) was fairly consistent over time, although not fixed.

In the wider context of UK local government, the model of de-centralisation formalised by the New Labour government (The Cabinet Office 1999) directed that new policy initiatives should be developed to complement existing services suggesting that the new services would be modelled on or shaped by previous policy decisions in the local authority. In Mid City, the case study highlighted that the existing system was perceived as coherent and forward thinking; an area that received positive evaluation results. In Kingdon's (1995) terminology it could be suggested that there was a high probability that other initiatives in the same policy areas might also be implemented in a positive way. Conversely, any policies based on existing systems that are already incoherent or struggling are highly likely to have poor results in terms of coherent and successful implementation. In this way, then, an understanding of the most important drivers in the local authority (in a particular policy area) will allow policy makers to identify where any barriers or

enabling elements lie and to use these to predict how subsequent policy will be implemented.

This challenges some of the criticisms of Kingdon's model that suggest it has no predictive capacity (Mucciaroni 1992). Perhaps at central level in the UK system, where changes in the ruling political party occur more often or more rapidly the model may be less useful as a predictor but at local authority level where heritage has a more prominent role in shaping the way that policy is developed (Wilson and Game 2006), and specifically in Mid City where heritage has a level of consistency, the model can be used to provide some structure and clarity in understanding the likely outcome of future policy development.

6.4 Using Kingdon's model to Explain Change and Continuity

Kingdon's (1995) model was developed to help in the understanding of policy change; why certain policies were developed and acted on at certain times. By default the periods between these significant policy changes were seen as times when there was separate activity in all three streams preparing for the next policy change. As a result Kingdon's (1995) model has been accepted as being very important in understanding policy change but has not been used to the same extent in exploring the activity that goes on between these periods of policy change. This ability of a model or theory to explain times of policy change *and* stability is, according to John (2012), what is missing in many public policy theoretical models. This section will explore the activity in the three streams outside of the window of opportunity and show that in the case of the Children's

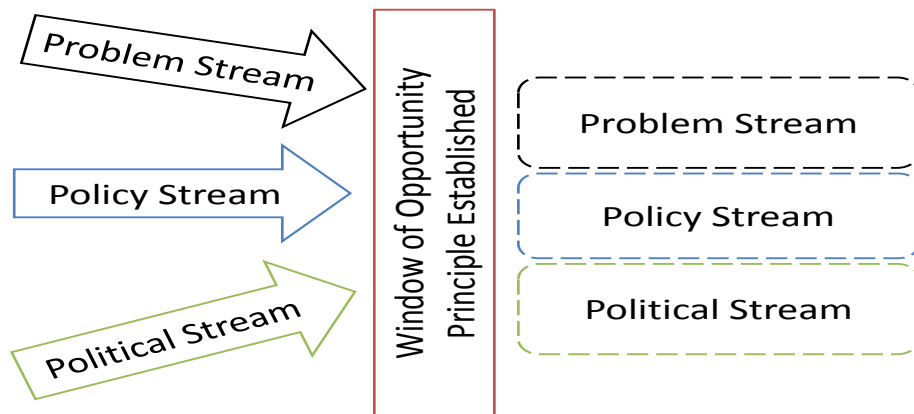
Centre Programme Kingdon's (1995) model can be useful in understanding this activity also.

6.4.1 Inter-dependency of the streams

The nature of a model that is wide ranging and flexible is that some elements of the model are likely to get more discussion and academic coverage than others. This is certainly the case when looking at Kingdon's (1995) model; some aspects of the model, particularly the role of the window of opportunity in the process of policy change, have been covered extensively (Keskitalo et.al 2010, Botterill 2013, Brunner 2008, Riddle 2009, Zahariadis 2003, Lieberman, J. 2002, Terrill 1989). The discussion of the relationship between the three streams at other times, times of less rapid change or times of stability, have been less extensive (Exworthy et.al 2002, Mucciaroni 1992, Sabatier 1999). The window of opportunity is often portrayed as the end product; the conclusion of Kingdon's (1995) model when policy change is achieved and the problem, policy and political streams separate and continue to develop independent of each other. In the case of the Children's Centre Programme a significant window of opportunity was opened with the election of the New Labour government in 1997 and this allowed for a number of planned early years policy changes. The creation of Early Excellence Centres and the provision of nursery places for four year olds were both manifesto commitments; they had been policy ideas developed and waiting in the policy stream for the time to be right. The development of these initiatives are a good example of the window of opportunity in action, however the majority of the

policy change and development related to the Children's Centre Programme did not occur directly following the 1997 election.

It has been shown in previous chapters that the most important outcome of the window of opportunity that was linked to the 1997 election victory was that a principle was established. The principle of using a social investment approach through policies of early intervention focusing on children and families provided the framework for the Children's Centre development over the next eight years. The case study identified that once the principle of government addressing the issue of Cycles of Disadvantage had been established in the window of opportunity, the three streams of problem, policy and politics remained closely linked and continued to develop. Rather than the streams becoming independent again they remained joined and interactions between the three streams continued; this shaped the continuity (and appearance of continuity) and change that followed. The diagram below (fig. 6.1) shows how the three streams, although still distinct, remain closely aligned after the window of opportunity has occurred with the broken lines around them representing the continued interaction between the streams.



(Fig. 6.1 The Continued Interaction of the Streams after the Window of Opportunity)

One of the most significant examples of this continued linkage between the three streams after the window of opportunity had passed was the change in the 'Sure Start' scheme. It was shown in chapter four that the Sure Start Local Programmes were conceived before the 1997 election and put in place as high profile, well-funded, innovative area based initiatives from 1999 but by 2003 Sure Start had officially become a set of principles, aims and approaches. This change was significant as it formed the justification for the development of the Children's Centre Programme but it cannot simply be put down to independent developments in the policy stream. In the run up to the change little official data had been received from the National Evaluation of Sure Start and anecdotal evidence from practitioners and parents, using the Local Programmes, was positive. Developments exclusively within the policy stream would have suggested a continuation or expansion of the Local Programmes, albeit with some minor alterations. Instead a new Children's Centre Programme was conceived which

brought together the three existing pilot projects; Sure Start Local Programmes, Early Excellence Centres and Neighbourhood Nurseries and combined the 'early intervention' and 'work activation of parents' approaches within government which had until now operated separately. The case study showed that this change and the decision to portray it as continuity did not originate in the policy stream but was the result of a number of issues in the political stream which fed into the policy stream and strengthens the case that the streams remained at least partially linked after the window of opportunity had passed. The competing agendas of those within government in terms of work activation and early intervention, the public and cross party political support for the Sure Start initiative and the position in the political cycle were all important elements in the political stream that fed into and shaped the policy stream.

These developments in the policy stream were also linked to and justified by changes in the problem stream. The problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty had not changed; there had been few new developments in the problem stream in terms of new research evidence or new theoretical approaches. What had changed was the causal story (Stone 1989) that the government used to understand the problem; the interpretation and explanation of the problem shifted which allowed the shift in the policy. The development of the Sure Start Local Programmes, Early Excellence Centres and the Neighbourhood Nurseries as pilot initiatives occurred within a context where the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty were seen as mostly structural. By the time the Children's Centre Programme was announced in 2002 and further developed in the following

years, ideas of individual responsibility had become more prominent in the government rhetoric and policy and families who had not engaged with the new initiatives began to be seen as resistant to the opportunities that government were offering. New Labour's commitment to the Third Way ideology allowed them to take on a range of ideas about the reason for the continuation of Cycles of Disadvantage and as discussed in chapter three this resulted in changes in the way that they interpreted and re-interpreted evidence in the problem stream.

A partial coupling of two streams; political and policy, policy and problem or problem and political is recognised by Kingdon (1995) as important in the wider policy process but not necessarily in policy change. What is significant in the case of the Children's Centre Programme, however, is that these changes in the policy and problem streams were led by political ideology and political expediency suggesting a continued link between all three streams. In this example, then, the three streams can clearly be seen to remain interlinked if not completely joined far beyond the window of opportunity brought on by the 1997 election result. This inter-linkage goes beyond the partial coupling described by Kingdon (1995) but does not fully support other discussions which question the independence of the streams (Mucciaroni 1992, Sabatier 1999). Instead the case study shows that the joining process that occurs at the window of opportunity, where that window results in the establishing of a principle, is enduring and in this case the streams remained inter-dependent for a sustained period.

6.4.2 Feedback Within Streams

Central to this continued interaction of the streams is the notion of feedback which Kingdon (1995) highlights as being important in the development of the problem and policy streams. This feedback can come from a variety of formal and informal sources; official evaluations and committees, local constituents with personal experience, media or opinion polls. Whatever the source, Kingdon suggests that:

This feedback often brings problems to [policy makers] attention: programs that are not working as planned, implementation that does not square with their interpretation of the legislative mandate, new problems that have arisen as a result of a program's enactment, or unanticipated consequences that must be remedied (Kingdon 1995 p.100-101).

The term feedback introduces the idea of a cyclical process and if, as Kingdon (1995) suggests, the streams are largely independent before and after the window of opportunity then feedback would also largely be contained within individual streams. The case study evidence suggests that this is not the case. If, as is suggested here, context is crucial to understanding the policy process a cyclical model becomes problematic. Any observation or criticism of policy will be received in a particular context constructed by, for example: the position in the electoral cycle, wider national and international events, the impact and outcomes of other policies, the individual receiving or reviewing the feedback and the particular construction of the problem to be addressed. At the point of feedback this context

will be different from when the policy was initially conceived and or enacted; although problems, policies and political ideas may re-surface they can never emerge in the same context. In the case of the Children's Centre Programme the context of policy development in 2002-2005 when the Programme was developed was very different to that of 1997-2001 when the pilot initiatives were rolled out and as such any 'feedback' from policy developments would be acted on and incorporated into the policy process in different ways. By 2002-2005 the government were more experienced, perhaps less idealistic, were attracting more criticism and had become involved in wider international events that impacted on their general popularity. A model of feed-forward is a more appropriate term as it acknowledges the importance of gaining information, evaluation and reaction to the development of ideas and policy but acknowledges that this information feeds forwards into a new context.

The case study also provides evidence of this feedback / forward crossing streams rather than being contained in independent streams. It is not as simple as feedback from policy being used to improve and adapt policy and new research on a social problem leading to a new construction of a problem. Information in the political stream, for example public opinion polls, voting predictions, or changes in ministers will impact on both the problem and policy streams. The three streams remain closely linked and impact on each other for as long as the original principle that brought them together remains intact.

The way that results from the NESS impact study (2005) were dealt with and used was another clear example of the feed-forward ideas as the impact results fed into

the specific political context of 2005 rather than feeding back into a neutral policy stream loop. In this case a simple and contained feedback loop would suggest a significant re-evaluation of the Sure Start scheme but the political context meant that this was not a viable option. This was partly due to the commitments already made to extending the programme but also due to the ideological position taken by those in government in terms of the importance of the Children's Centre Programme.

These changes in the conception of 'Sure Start' and the development of the Children's Centre Programme occurred in 2002, five years after the original window of opportunity occurred and it is suggested in this thesis that this change was not as the result of another window of opportunity but was part of the process of evolutionary change facilitated by the continued connection of the three streams and a system of feed-forward within and between the streams. Developing Kingdon's (1995) model in this way show how it can be used not only to explain and explore policy change but also policy stability, of key importance in a comprehensive model of public policy (John 2012).

6.4.3 Central Position of the Political Stream

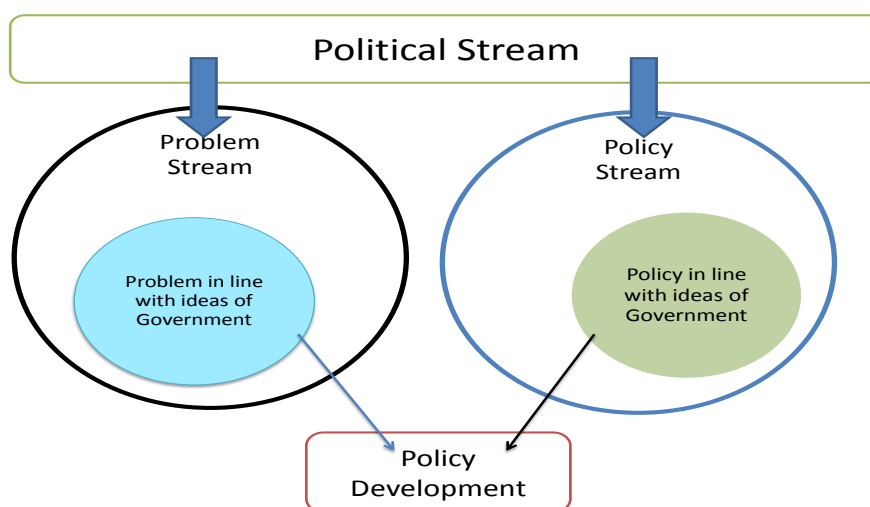
Kingdon acknowledged the importance of the political stream in the policy-making process but both his own work and others' application of his work have shown that the influence of the political stream varies between policy areas and types of governments (Kingdon 1995, 2001, Zahariadis , Terrill 1989, Exworthy and Powell 2004, Mannheimer et.al 2007). In the case of the Children's Centre Programme the political stream was shown to be dominant in the agenda setting, alternative

selection and implementation phases. The party political system in the UK goes some way to explaining this dominance at central level as any party that is elected into government with a majority has the potential to shape the problems that are raised as needing to be dealt with as well as the sorts of policies that can be considered to deal with the problem. Keeler (1993) suggests that the strength of the political mandate is the "...quintessential window-opening political development ... the achievement of an impressive mandate, a landslide victory ... make[s] a new government appear authorized and empowered by the public to implement its program" (1993 p.436-7). In the case of New Labour they were elected in 1997 with a large majority winning 418 seats in parliament compared to the Conservatives 165; this gave them scope to make significant change. Acknowledging the authority that this majority provides does not mean that the problem and policy streams become static between general elections; ideas continue to circulate and develop in both streams but in the UK system the political stream, specifically the party in government, sets boundaries and influences the way problems and policies are framed.

At local level the political stream has also been shown to be pivotal in explaining the way that policy develops but in cases like the Children's Centre Programme described in this thesis, where the problem and policy stream are largely driven by central processes the fit between national and local political streams is also an important factor to consider.

Kingdon (1995) used the analogy of a river to describe the streams in his model; ideas form, float, disperse, re-combine and re-emerge but they do this within the

boundary provided by the 'river banks'. Chapter two used the concept of political paradigms as a way of understanding these 'river banks', the neo-liberal paradigm being dominant during the period in question. The dominance of the political stream in the case of the Children's Centre Programme suggests that there are in fact further structures working within the problem and policy stream that are shaped by specific political ideology within the wider paradigm. The ideological position of the party in power; sometimes very tightly defined and sometimes more fluid, will determine what constitutes problems and policies and in this way create a subset within each stream; it is from these subsets that usable problems and policy emerge.



(Fig. 6.2 Influence of the Political Stream)

These subsets can act to exclude a range of problems and policy gaining access to the government's agenda but if the political ideology is relatively fluid, like the Third Way, then a wider variety of problem and policy will be considered. Ideas that do not fit with the political ideology will continue to develop and evolve but will

stand very little chance of being placed on the agenda or chosen for enactment unless they can be seen to fit with the specifics of the subset described above. In addition policy entrepreneurs may shape, adapt and re-frame their favoured problem or policy so that it fits within the subset. In this way the political stream shapes the other two streams. An example of this at central level can be seen in the specific drive to get mothers and especially lone mothers into work. The case study evidence suggests that this commitment to increasing women's participation in the Labour market, developed before the 1997 election, emerged from a broadly feminist agenda of gender equality and from the desire to improve economic growth. By the time that the Children's Centre's Programme was announced in 2002 the drive to move parents into work had been firmly attached to the social investment and child poverty agenda. Although there are clear links that can be made to justify this attachment it is important to note that this re-framing was politically driven.

In the case of the Children's Centre Programme the political stream was then essential in opening the window of opportunity and shaping the problem and policy that were considered there. In addition however, it was shown in the previous section that the three streams continue to interact after the window of opportunity has passed but this is not necessarily in an unstructured way. In this case the political stream remained dominant after the window of opportunity had passed and drove both the shift in the understanding of the problem and in the conception of the policy to solve the problem.

At local level in Mid City the political stream was also dominant. One of the key factors raised by many of those interviewed was the heritage of the local authority and it was discussed earlier in this chapter how this in turn shaped and was shaped by the individuals involved in early years in the authority. The commitment to community development, the dominance of very active local councillors within wards and the importance ascribed to early years within Mid City all contributed to a political stream that shaped the way that the Children's Centre Programme was developed. The long legacy of Labour control in Mid City should also be seen as significant in its general approach to issues related to Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty and could go some way to understanding the difference in implementation of the programme in different local authorities described by other academic studies and by those interviewed for the case study who had personal experience of implementation in other local authorities. If the political stream is the dominant fact in driving implementation, and it is accepted that the political stream will differ between local authorities (Wilson and Game 2006), understanding of the differences in implementation become much clearer.

6.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to bring together analysis from the previous three chapters. Doing this provides a synthesis that allows a clear understanding of the way that Kingdon's model can be used as a lens through which to view the Children's Centre Programme. The chapter has shown how the framework of problem, policy and politics has been useful in understanding how each stage of the policy-making process developed but that by using the model across the agenda

setting, alternative selection and implementation stages Kingdon's (1995) framework shows how the significant elements in the process become more or less important at different times. Central to all three stages are issues of structure and agency and the chapter has identified how Kingdon's model allowed an analysis of this relationship without attributing prominence to one or the other elements. The relationship between structural and agential factors is at the heart of much of the analysis in this thesis and in fact in the wider policy-making literature; the case study of the Children's Centre Programme showed that this relationship is fluid with processes and individuals interacting and impacting on each other throughout the policy-making process.

In addition to looking at the way that Kingdon's (1995) model helps in a fuller understanding of the Children's Centre Programme this chapter has also shown how the case study presented here can be used to re-visit some aspects of Kingdon's (1995) model and in places to extend the model further. The most significant example of this is in the extension of the model to the implementation phase. Kingdon (1995) made no attempt to extend his research beyond the central government stage but others have raised this as being necessary if the model is to be seen as comprehensive (Zahariadis 2007, John 2012). The case study of Mid City extended the model and showed that the framework of problem, policy and politics can be easily applied to the local implementation phase. In addition the case study highlighted that Kingdon's (1995) conception of the policy entrepreneur could also be applied at the local level, in fact this explanation of front line working is perhaps more relevant than Lipsky's (1980) explanation of the role of individuals more

closely linked to implementation studies. Conversely the case study showed that at central level the role of ministers and civil servants did not always fit with Kingdon's ideas of policy entrepreneurs, although they were significant in the way that policy developed. This chapter has suggested that the two labels attributed to individuals in the policy-making process; policy entrepreneurs and street level bureaucrats need to be rethought and used alongside each other at both central and local levels.

Finally this chapter has explored the relationship between the streams that Kingdon describes. Led by the case study of the Children's Centre Programme it has been shown that the relationship between the streams beyond the window of opportunity continues; not only do the individual, independent streams continue to evolve (as Kingdon (1995) suggests) but the inter-play between the streams continues and in the case study reported here the political stream continues to dominate this development. Instead of Kingdon's model been seen as simply a way of understanding significant policy change the case study of the Children's Centre shows that the model can also be used to understand continuity.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

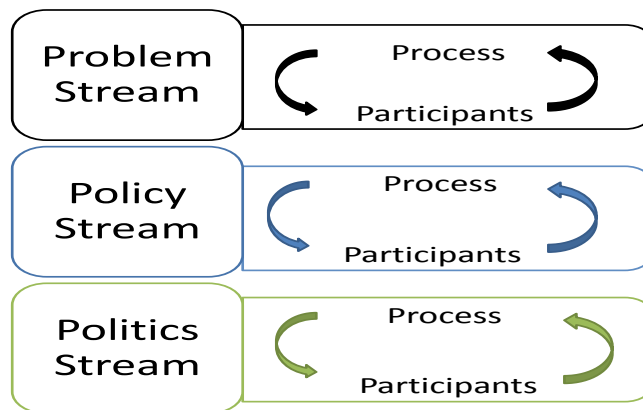
The Sure Start Children's Centre Programme was a significant legacy of the New Labour governments in the UK. The programme marked a long term and substantial commitment to improving the lives of young children and their parents with the hope of improving the life chances of the poorest children and in the process breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage. Not only did the programme demonstrate a number of ideological positions held by the New Labour government (social investment, early intervention, ideas of structuration), it also embodied a new way of policy-making aimed at joining up central and local policy makers and implementers (The Cabinet Office 1998, Eisenstadt 2012). By the time New Labour left office in 2010 there were 3500 Sure Start Children's Centres and, as important, the value of investing in the very young had been accepted across the political spectrum. As the country entered a period of recession, experienced a change in government and came to terms with enormous cuts in public sector services imposed by the new government, threats to close Sure Start Children's Centres hit the local and national press and resulted in parents and professionals alike campaigning against any such closures. Initially these protests often resulted in a change of mind by the local authority in question but as austerity measures continued and essential public services became threatened the future of Children's Centres became less sure. The period between 1997 and 2010 can be seen as a unique period in early years services, the full impact of which is yet to be seen.

The opportunity to study the emergence of a 'new' area of social policy is rare. Clearly there have always been early years services but the move to provide these services as a coherent area of Social Policy, funded by government was new. This thesis has taken this opportunity and provided a detailed analysis of how the programme moved from a set of ideas to a national programme delivered in every local authority. The story of the Children's Centres is fascinating however it is not enough for a PhD thesis to tell the story; in order to fully understand the development of this programme the thesis has drawn on theories of public policy and implementation and in doing so has shown that policy development is a complex interplay of ideas, structures, individuals and external events with a touch of randomness. Kingdon's (1995) model of policy-making has proved invaluable in providing a framework for understanding the fine grain detail of the story of the Children's Centre Programme. This chapter will bring together the key aspects of Kingdon's model that have proved essential in understanding the development of the Children's Centre Programme before outlining the specific contributions to knowledge that this thesis provides.

7.1 Kingdon's Model as a Framework

Kingdon's streams model (1995) provides a comprehensive theory of the policy-making process, exploring how issues get onto the policy-making agenda and how specific policies are chosen over others to deal with issues. It incorporates the influence of ideas, institutions, individuals, networks and external events in a fluid and dynamic model that acknowledges the complexity of the policy-making process. Two distinct parts of the original model have been identified and used in

the previous chapters; the most well used aspect of the theory being the streams themselves but alongside this the thesis uses Kingdon's ideas about the interplay between process (structure) and participant (agency) within the streams to gain a fuller understanding of the way that policy develops.



(Fig. 7.1 Kingdon's Streams Model)

Kingdon (1995) emphasises the fact that the three streams; problem, policy and politics are independent. The problem stream is concerned with identifying and framing policy problems. A whole range of problems will be raised and considered within this stream rising to prominence through, for example, new research, media or public concern or crisis and focusing events. Individuals, groups or networks may identify or attempt to maintain the wider interest in a problem in this stream in order for it to become an issue to be dealt with by government. The policy stream is concerned with developing policy ideas to deal with perceived problems but these may not necessarily be directly connected to the discussions in the problem stream. Policy ideas develop, evolve and re-combine within the stream ready to be used when the 'time is right'. The political stream is concerned with the wider

context of policy development; factors such as governments, media influence and public opinion all impact on the context in which policy is made.

Within each of these streams, sometimes overlapping, are processes (structures) and participants (individuals) that act and interact to facilitate or constrain policy change and development. Ideas about problems and policy need individuals to discuss, champion and enact them. Kingdon (1995) refers to these individuals as policy entrepreneurs; individuals who have a clear understanding of a specific issue and a drive to push the particular problem or policy solution. The influence of these individuals will vary depending on the position they hold (for example campaigner, ministerial advisor, journalist) but these individuals, or indeed the wider groups that they may be linked to, act within established institutions and processes that set the 'rules of the game'. In addition wider structural factors related to the economy, global influences or changes in Governance will all impact on the way that the three streams develop. It is the detail of the process and participants that shape the streams in each policy context.

The window of opportunity is a central part of Kingdon's (1995) model; although the three streams are independent, for policy to change the streams must converge. The problem must have a policy solution identified and attached to it and the context or climate provided by the political stream must be open to the policy change or development. In fact it is often changes in the political stream that open the window of opportunity and drive the joining of the streams. It is this notion of a window of opportunity and the nature of its opening and effect that has provided the most academic discussion of Kingdon's work (Farley et.al 2007,

Lieberman, J. 2002, Botterill 2013, Brunner 2008, Pralle 2009) but this thesis has shown that the model is not just useful in understanding large policy change linked to the window of opportunity. The streams model is also useful for understanding how the window can set a precedent and shift the nature of the problem and policy streams meaning that the impact of the window continues as policy remains stable and or changes in a less dramatic way. Chapter four showed how this was the case in the Children's Centre Programme which developed out of the principle that government could and should intervene to address the issue of Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty. The programme was not announced until 2002 and was not put into place until 2006, a number of years after the initial window of opportunity opened but the chapter showed that this development was driven and enabled by the principle established in 1997.

Kingdon's model covers two specific aspects of the policy process; agenda setting and alternative selection and he suggests that at each stage different elements of the model are dominant; Kingdon's suggestions proved to be broadly accurate in the case of the Children's Centre Programme. At the agenda setting phase Kingdon (1995) identifies the problem and political streams as dominant along with visible (high profile) participants and this was shown to be the case in chapter three. The most significant elements involved in opening the window of opportunity were the discussions around Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty (the problem stream) and the election of the New Labour government with a substantial majority (the political stream). This window was used to establish Cycles of Disadvantage and persistent poverty on the agenda as a problem that could and

should be dealt with by government. More specifically as shown in chapter three the process elements of the political stream proved to be pivotal; the ideological commitment to a social investment approach, ideas of structuration and the more general Third Way approach shaped the way that the problem was framed and ensured it was firmly established on the government's agenda.

At the alternative selection phase Kingdon (1995) suggests that the policy stream is prominent alongside hidden participants. In the case of the Children's Centre Programme it was shown in chapter four that the policy stream was central but this was not straight forward as the two themes of Early Intervention and Work Activation for parents both developed, surfaced in the primeval policy soup (Kingdon 1995) and both had an element of success in getting chosen and enacted. Shaped by policy entrepreneurs; new civil servants with direct experience of Early Year policy and ministers (some of whom had a personal commitment to the policy development in this area), the Early Excellence Centres, Neighbourhood Nurseries and Sure Start Local Programmes were all developed. As explored in chapter four both the Early Intervention and the Work Activation for parents policy approaches were put forward to address the issue of Cycles of Disadvantage but this should not be taken to mean that they were complementary policy developments. Initially they took significantly different routes and those interviewed at national and regional level highlighted the level of conflict and competition that existed between the approaches. Rather than the conflict and competition only taking place in the policy stream resulting in one overall policy 'winner', both approaches and all three programmes were developed. The reason that the policy selection process differed

from that described by Kingdon (1995) in this case can be seen to be connected to the strong influence of elements in the political stream. First the window of opportunity established a principle rather than allowed the passing of one specific piece of legislation, second the broadness of this principle due to the broadness of the problem that it was attached to meant that a number of causal stories (Stone 1989) could be attached to it giving the government the opportunity to try different approaches. Finally the strength of the New Labour mandate that opened the window of opportunity was significant enough to give the government the confidence and perceived authority to act on a range of ideas to address the problem (Keeler 1993). The continued strength of the national mood and the desire to follow an ideological path meant that the government continued to develop the Children's Centre Programme in spite of poor or unavailable evaluation results. Case study evidence also suggested that, in addition to the influence of hidden participants described by Kingdon (1995), high profile visible participants in the political stream including the prime minister were involved in this phase of policy development.

At the implementation phase, extending Kingdon's model (1995), the case study showed that although the Children's Centre was centrally conceived and directed (all local authorities had to develop the Centres) the local and central political streams were one of the most significant drivers in the way that the programme developed. Documentation and interview data showed that the heritage of Mid City and its commitment to the early years sector, judged by their previous actions, was seen by those working in the authority as both a driving and an enabling factor.

The importance of 'buy in' to the scheme was also raised by those working at a more strategic level who were clear that where the local authority understood the importance of the programme and supported the approach, the implementation worked more smoothly. The change in the relationship between central and local government brought on by the New Labour Modernising government approach (The Cabinet Office 1999) meant that the influence of the local political stream became more prominent as local authorities were expected to shape the Children's Centre Programme to fit with their existing services and needs. In addition to the importance of the process elements, the case study showed that individuals in the local authority were important in shaping the programme. The personal commitment to the principles of early intervention held by both the local authority officers and the Children's Centre managers fitted well with the heritage of Mid City and it was highlighted that these two things are unlikely to be coincidental. It is important to consider that individuals are likely to consciously or unconsciously choose the context that fits with their own views and approaches and this was certainly the case in Mid City. The individuals operating at local level were shown in the previous chapter to be more similar to Kingdon's (1995) policy entrepreneurs than Lipsky's (1980) street level bureaucrats but it was demonstrated that the two terms are useful in understanding the role played by individuals at both local and national levels.

7.2 Reflections on the Research

At the beginning of this thesis three research objectives were identified:

- i) To identify the range of factors that drove New Labour's understanding of, and policy responses to, the problem of Cycles of Disadvantage in families with children.
- ii) To analyse the development of the Children's Centre Programme using existing theories of policy-making and implementation.
- iii) To analyse the role of context in the development of the Children's Centre Programme at local level.

Each research objective has been met using a combination of existing literature, central and local government documentation and interview evidence. Taken together they have provided a rich, qualitative account of the Children's Centre Programme at both national and local levels. In addition the use of policy-making and implementation theory has provided a framework for analysis that has allowed an in-depth consideration of the many different influential factors in the Children's Centre Programme development.

There are, of course, limitations to the research presented here and although these limitations were identified in chapter one it is worth revisiting them as the thesis nears its end. One of the benefits of undertaking a case study is the richness and depth that this provides, allowing the whole range of influential factors to be taken into account and analysed together in context. At the same time focusing on only one local authority area has meant that the thesis has not provided any comparative data to support claims made. It was stated in chapter one that Mid City was chosen as a 'typical case' (Yin 2009) because it was assumed that it was no more or less unusual than other cities. Chapter five reinforced this beyond

expectations, the combination of contextual factors that shaped Mid City are unlikely to be found in any other local authority but the case study data showed that there were themes and patterns within the authority that could be seen as enabling or supportive of the Children's Centre development. By only engaging with one embedded unit of analysis (Yin 2009) this thesis was not able to test these themes against other local authorities. At local level, context proved crucial to the nature of the development and making comparisons to other local authorities could have been particularly useful. Kingdon's (1995) model has been shown to be an excellent framework to study the importance of context and so by using more local authorities in the thesis Kingdon's model could have been tested further in its application to the local level. This limitation was considered at the start of the research and it was felt that the fine grained detail that would be achieved in focusing on only one local authority was more important than including a comparative element. The way that the central and local development has been presented in the thesis does however provide the opportunity for the research to be extended to other local authorities and if this is done it may be possible to further test the thesis.

7.3 Contributions to Knowledge

In undertaking the research recorded in this thesis two distinct contributions to the academic field have been made. The first is that the thesis has extended the policy-making literature by applying it to a 'new' area of policy. Due to the many different strands of policy-making theory it is easy to stick to examples of policy or policy areas that support the particular theory in question (John 2012, Cairney 2012) and

this might be the reason for the omission of the area of early years from the policy-making literature. In addition and as highlighted in the introduction, before 1997 the early years lacked coherence (HM Treasury 1999) and may not have been seen as a legitimate area of public policy. In the search for a comprehensive model for understanding the policy-making process it is important to have a wide range of policy areas from which to choose when testing theory and so it is important to broaden the base of the policy-making literature with the introduction of less commonly used policy areas; this thesis has shown that early years is a relevant area of potential study for public policy.

Secondly as highlighted in the previous chapter the thesis has extended Kingdon's (1995) model in a number of ways. By using Kingdon at central and local level the thesis has shown that the model is very useful in understanding the fine grain detail of the implementation phase. Although a small number of others have used Kingdon at local level (Exworthy et al. 2002, Exworthy and Powell 2004, Mannheimer et.al 2007, Ridde 2009) it was shown that these have largely been concerned with testing the existence of windows of opportunity at local as well as central level and the way that these 'little windows' lead to successful or unsuccessful policy implementation. These case studies have been useful in establishing the fact that some of Kingdon's ideas can be applied at a local level but as highlighted earlier their sole focus on the window of opportunity does not go far enough in establishing the streams approach as a comprehensive model of policy making and implementation (John 2012). This thesis has not attempted to identify a local window of opportunity; in part this is due to the fact that the programme

being studied was a compulsory programme that local authorities were required to implement. More significant than identifying a specific window of opportunity that allowed change at the local level; this thesis has shown how Kingdon's model can be used to understand the nature of change in the local authority and the way that structure and agency operate to shape the development in a more qualitative way. Evaluating the development using the understandings of those most closely involved in the implementation of the programme has given a unique insight into the way that the heritage of the local authority interacted with the individual managers and local authority officers involved in the front line implementation of the programme. In doing this it was also shown in the previous chapter that there is the potential for Kingdon's framework to have a predictive capacity at local level. Kingdon talks of the model being probabilistic in relation to national policy-making but at local level, in a place like Mid City where structural factors remain relatively stable and agential factors fit into and around these there is the potential to use a study like the one described here to understand both enabling and constraining factors in this area of policy.

In terms of the model in a more general sense, the case study has shown how the three streams of problem, policy and politics can remain joined and continue to interact even after the window of opportunity has passed. This thesis has focused on the interaction of the three streams, both before and after the window of opportunity, and shown how the influence of the political stream remains dominant in policy continuity and change. The development of the Children's Centre Programme took much longer than any window of opportunity could remain open

but the relationship between the streams before and after the window opening cannot be seen as the partial coupling described by Kingdon (1995). The problem, policy and political streams continued to develop and influence each other throughout the period between 1997 and 2006 (and beyond as the programme continued to develop).

These extensions of Kingdon's (1995) model at central and local levels are useful in encouraging a re-evaluation of the model. Instead of placing the streams model into a purely 'agenda setting' category the thesis shows that the model is comprehensive in its ability to explain both continuity and change at both central and local level.

7.4 Concluding Remarks

Since beginning this study in 2009 there has been a great deal of change in UK social policy. A change in government in 2010 and a programme of significant public sector cuts have meant that the national and local context of policy-making has altered in many ways. Children's Centres are no longer held up as the centre piece of early years policy and there is a pressure for centres to shift back from a universal to a more targeted approach. Rather than closing Children's Centres in the face of massive financial cuts Mid City has started to re-organise their Children's Social Care provision and with it the Children's Centres, taking an innovative and forward thinking approach.

The success of this move and the continuation of the Children's Centres in one form or another will depend to a large extent on the contextual factors highlighted in this

thesis. Understanding the interplay of the structural and agential factors that make up that context can provide a very important starting point for understanding and predicting the way policy change will be enacted.

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Appendix 1

Interviews Conducted:

Former Minister

Ministerial Advisor

Regional Advisor on Children Centre Development

Senior Civil Servant, Sure Start Unit

Local Authority Officer – Mid City Head of Service

Local Authority Officer – Mid City Deputy Head of Service

Local Authority Officer – previous Local Programme Manager

Former Local Authority Officer

Children's Centre Managers x 12

Documents Analysed:

DfEE (2002) *Inter-departmental Childcare Review – Delivering for Children and Families*

DfES (2003) SureStart Guidance 2004-2006 Part 1 *Overview and Local Delivery Arrangements*

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Mid City Council (2006) Sure Start Scrutiny Review Group, Final Report

Appendix 2

Interview Schedule – Children’s Centre Managers

Areas for discussion

Your own professional background and career path.

Your knowledge and experience of Local Programmes.

Your understanding of why the Government introduced the Children's Centre programme.

Your understanding of the key differences, if any, between the Children’s Centres and existing programmes.

Your experience of any barriers or problems that the change has encountered.

Your understanding of the overall aims of the 'Sure Start' programmes.

What is your understanding of the position of children’s centres under the Coalition Government – what do you understand their plans to be?

Interview Schedule –

Former Minister

Ministerial Advisor

Senior Civil Servant

Areas for Discussion

Outline of specific involvement in the Sure Start programme.

How did you see the relationship between Early Excellence Centres, Neighbourhood Nurseries and Sure Start Local Programmes?

Importance of early NESS feedback.

Importance of media coverage of the feedback.

Importance of the wider political context- strong mandate, public support.

Did priorities of Children's Centres reflect priorities of the Government or individual Ministers?

How important was cross departmental working?

Interview Schedule - Regional Advisor

Areas for Discussion

Background and career path.

Involvement in Sure Start and Children's Centres.

Key drivers of change in move to Children's Centres; national and local.

Relationship between Neighbourhood Nurseries, Early Excellence Centres and Sure Start Local Programmes.

How important was the Local Authority in the implementation phase?

What were the key issues \ barriers to implementation?

Any common factors about the Local Authorities that did well or struggled?

Interview Schedule – Local Authority Officers

Areas for Discussion

Background and career path.

Involvement in Sure Start and Children's Centres.

Key drivers of the change to Children's Centres – national and local.

Effectiveness / clarity of communication from national level.

Situation of Early Years in Mid City before Sure Start.

How did Mid City organise and manage the change to Children's Centres?

Any specific difficulties?